



ABIOS

Acquired Brain Injury Outreach Service

FACTSHEET: Communication

Audience: Person with ABI

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Understanding Aphasia after Acquired Brain Injury

"Aphasia is a debilitating communication disability caused by damage to the language processing centres of the brain. An individual with aphasia may have difficulty understanding, talking, reading and writing, but their intelligence is not affected. The most common causes of aphasia are stroke and traumatic brain injury"

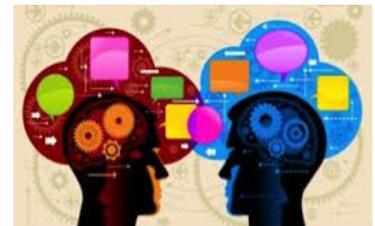
(NHMRC Centre of Clinical Research Excellence in Aphasia, Australia)

If you have **aphasia**, you may experience **difficulty** with a number of **everyday activities**. For example:

- having a **conversation**
- **talking** in a group or **noisy** environment
- **reading** a book or magazine or road sign
- **understanding** or telling jokes
- **writing** a letter or filling in a form
- using the **phone**
- using **numbers and money**
- **saying your name** or the names of your family members
- **expressing** your immediate needs, ideas or words
- **going out** into the community

Quite often, family members or carers may find it **challenging to understand** aphasia and they may find it hard to:

- **slow down** their speaking
- resist **finishing your sentences**
- **adapt** the way they communicate
- keep the **conversation going**
- **understand** what you are saying
- **know what to do**



The **good news** is that there are communication **techniques** that can **help** ease the exchange of information between you and your conversation partner:

(1) Getting the message IN is a matter of **others modifying** the way they communicate to help you **understand**.

Some examples include:

- ✚ Using **short, simple sentences** and an expressive voice.
- ✚ Using **gestures** when communicating to add more visual information
- ✚ **Writing keywords** or main ideas down – e.g. large or bold print.
- ✚ **Using pictures** and focusing on **one topic at a time**.
- ✚ **Eliminating distraction** – noises, people, or multiple visual materials.
- ✚ **Observing** your facial expression, eye gaze, body posture or gestures to help them know if you have understood

(2) Getting the message OUT is a matter of how others help you to **express your thoughts**

Some examples include:

- ✚ Asking you **yes or no questions**.
- ✚ Asking **one question** at a time.
- ✚ Using **gesture, pointing** to objects or pictures, or **writing** key words, such as “*Can you show me...*”
- ✚ Giving you sufficient **time** to understand and to respond.
- ✚ Asking **fixed choice questions** – e.g. “Do you want water or coffee?”

(3) Verifying the message is a matter of others **summarising** your conversation slowly and clearly (E.g. “*So let me make sure I understand...*”), which is important in making you feel understood and valued.

Some examples include:

- ✚ Adding **gestures** or **written key words**.
- ✚ **Repeating** your message.
- ✚ **Expanding** on what they think you might be saying
- ✚ **Recapping** the conversation (particularly if it was a long one)

Courtesy of The Aphasia Institute (Toronto, Canada)

Consult a Speech Pathologist for specialist aphasia support and advice.

For further reading and / or support:

1. **Australian Aphasia Association** (AAA) website: www.aphasia.org.au
2. NHMRC **Centre of Clinical Research Excellence in Aphasia** (CCRE in Aphasia Rehabilitation) website: www.ccreaphasia.org.au
3. National Stroke Foundation – Australia Website provided information and support options: <http://www.strokefoundation.com.au>
4. **Speech Pathology Australia** website: www.speechpathologyaustralia.org.au