

## Aphasia

**Aphasia** happens when there is damage to the parts of the brain involved with language.

It can affect how you speak, read, write, and understand speech.

Because communication is so important, aphasia can have a big impact on your life. It can affect relationships, family, career, leisure, healthcare, mental health, and identity.

Aphasia **does not** affect your intelligence.

More than 140,000 Australians live with aphasia.

There are many different causes of aphasia.

The most common one is **stroke**.

Aphasia can also be caused by **brain tumour**, **traumatic brain injury**, certain types of **dementia** (called primary progressive aphasia) and other conditions.

Aphasia often improves with rehabilitation.

However, primary progressive aphasia worsens over time as the dementia progresses.

### Living with aphasia

Aphasia affects people differently.

Some people have occasional problems finding words. Others find all communication difficult.

Some people find reading and writing difficult. Others have trouble understanding speech.

Language area	Examples of challenges
<p><b>Speaking</b></p> <p>People with aphasia know what they want to say but might not be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• find the words they need</li> <li>• choose the right word</li> <li>• form sentences</li> <li>• say words correctly</li> </ul>	<p>Participating in conversations, making phone calls, telling stories, asking for help, saying people's names.</p> <p>Having difficulty speaking can be very frustrating at times.</p>
<p><b>Understanding speech</b></p> <p>People with aphasia often need more time to understand speech. Long or complex sentences are usually more difficult to understand.</p>	<p>Understanding questions, comprehending instructions, following films or television, understanding detailed information.</p>
<p><b>Writing</b></p> <p>Spelling words and writing sentences can be difficult when typing or handwriting. Some people with aphasia cannot write.</p>	<p>Sending text messages, completing forms, writing emails, using computers, using a diary, making shopping lists.</p>
<p><b>Reading</b></p> <p>Reading is often challenging for people with aphasia, especially long or complex text.</p>	<p>Reading books, browsing the internet, following recipes, reading letters and emails.</p>

## Ways to help someone with aphasia

Give extra time. Acknowledge that the person with aphasia knows what they want to say. Reassure them that you're listening and can wait for them to finish.

It may help some people with aphasia if you speak more slowly or repeat key words. However, don't use a patronising tone.

You can also use images, writing and gestures alongside speech.

For written information, use short sentences, simple words, bolded keywords and larger fonts.

People with aphasia are at high risk of depression and anxiety. Helping them to communicate and stay connected socially is vital for their wellbeing.

## How speech pathologists can help

A speech pathologist may help by:

- identifying strengths and challenges in communication
- providing information and counselling tailored to the person with aphasia and their family
- providing language therapy to relearn skills. This could be face to face, telehealth, or self-managed therapy
- developing strategies to work around challenges. For example, practising strategies for conversation, using electronic communication devices, or setting up helpful technology such as dictation or text to speech
- helping family and friends learn the best ways to communicate with the person with aphasia
- supporting people to return to everyday activities like shopping, work, socialising, or leisure
- helping develop a plan for living well with aphasia.

## Other organisations that can help

If you have aphasia, you are not alone.

There are national and state-level organisations for aphasia, such as the [Australian Aphasia Association](#).

There are also peer support and communication [groups](#) for people with aphasia across Australia, face-to-face and online.

## Find out more

### Information on aphasia from stroke:

- <https://aphasia.org.au/about-aphasia/>
- <https://enableme.org.au/resources/speech-and-language>
- Information on Primary Progressive Aphasia: <https://www.rarementiasupport.org/primary-progressive-aphasia/>

### A list of videos about aphasia:

<https://www.youtube.com/user/aphasiachannel/playlists>