

Communication after a stroke

Having a stroke can affect your communication in different ways.

You might have trouble doing things you used to do easily, like speaking, reading, writing, typing and texting.

How strokes affect communication

A stroke happens when there's a blockage in the blood supply to a part of your brain.

The symptoms you experience depend on the part of your brain that has been affected.

- You might have trouble with language. This is called **aphasia**. You might not be able to find the right words, talk in sentences, understand what others say, or read and write. It happens in around 30 per cent of strokes, usually due to damage on the left side of the brain.
- You might have trouble speaking because of weakness in the muscles we use for speech. This is called **dysarthria**. It includes reduced breath support for your voice, or weak or slow movements of lips and tongue. Dysarthria affects 20–30% per cent of people after stroke.
- You might have trouble planning the movements for clear speech, even though your muscles are not weak. This is called **dyspraxia**. It often happens alongside aphasia.
- You might have trouble following the social rules of conversation, even though you can speak quite clearly. This is called **cognitive-communication** difficulty. It often happens if the damage is to the right side of the brain. You might go off topic, talk a lot, or miss humour, sarcasm or irony.

Importantly, having these communication difficulties **does not mean you have lost intelligence**.

You know what you want to say – but conveying those messages may be difficult.

The importance of communication for recovery

When you cannot express what you want or need, or how you are feeling, you may become very frustrated.

If you have trouble communicating, it can make you feel very isolated. It can affect your mood.

Communication difficulties can also make it hard to take part in the important discussions and decisions about your recovery and rehabilitation – even though you want to share your views and have a say.

Working with your friends and family

Conversations are two-way.

This means that you and the person you're talking to work together to understand each other and have a satisfying and respectful conversation.

Your friends and family can help you by:

- being patient, encouraging and giving you time to speak without interrupting
- keeping eye contact with you, and not talking down to you or being patronising
- using short, clear sentences without rushing
- being clear if they change the topic
- using gestures and facial expressions to support what they're saying
- using pictures or important written words for you to point to if you need to
- understanding that it's not your fault if you swear or use nonsense words
- asking you questions with a yes or no answer
- checking to make sure you understand what they have said
- making sure you have any glasses, hearing aids or devices you need.

How a speech pathologist can help

Your speech pathologist is an expert in communication and swallowing problems (dysphagia) after stroke. They work as part of the rehabilitation team.

They support you and your family and friends, explain the communication difficulties, answer questions, and find out what you need or are concerned about.

They might:

- assess you to diagnose your communication difficulties, and work out what you can still do
- set goals with you and do assessments to check on your progress over time
- work with you as an individual or in a group to help you practice and improve your speech and language
- give you strategies to improve your communication
- work with your friends and family to help you all communicate better together
- help you with reading and writing, as well as using a computer and telehealth services
- give you and your family ongoing support, advice, counselling and information
- offer you practice in groups to help you with social situations
- work with interpreters, Aboriginal Health Workers and others to make it easier for you to communicate.
- Speech pathology is helpful, people often get better at communicating after stroke, and may continue to improve over time.
- Staying connected with your friends and family is very important. The best practice for talking is talking.

Find out more

For more information contact:

Stroke Foundation Enable Me: <https://enableme.org.au/>

Australian Aphasia Association: <https://aphasia.org.au/>

Speech Pathology Australia: <https://www.speechpathologyaustralia.org.au/>