

AGING I&R/A TIPS

National Information & Referral Support Center

COMMUNICATING WITH PEOPLE WHO HAVE APHASIA AND/OR STROKE SURVIVORS

Aphasia is a condition that affects an individual's ability to communicate. Aphasia is always due to an injury to the brain—most commonly from a stroke, particularly in older people.

The National Institutes of Health estimates about 1 million Americans currently have aphasia. Up to 40% of people who have a stroke develop aphasia.

With aphasia, even simple tasks like talking on the phone can be frustrating. Here are some ways to help make conversations easier.

Communicating via Phone

- Speak clearly. Ask how you can help the individual.
- Don't rush. Allow the individual plenty of time to talk.
- Keep communication as simple as possible.
- Maintain a natural conversational manner appropriate for an adult.
- Ask yes/no questions when appropriate.
- Reword and repeat information, as needed.

- Avoid correcting the individual's speech.
- Be patient, positive, relaxed.
- Supplement phone conversations with written material.

Face-to-Face Communication

- Speak slowly and loudly enough that people understand you easily. Keep a smile on your face when you talk.
- Make eye contact in recognition of his or her presence.
- Allow time for the person to formulate a response. Be patient and unhurried.
- Be creative. Use gestures, facial expressions, or pointing to objects if helpful.
- Summarize. State or echo back what you think the individual means to be sure you are on the right track.
- Be honest. Let the client know when you cannot follow or understand.
- Follow-up with information in writing.

SOURCES: National Institutes of Health; and Page Nalipinski, "Aphasia: A Disorder of Language," Massachusetts General Hospital Patient Care Services, Boston, MA.

This publication was made possible through a cooperative agreement from the U.S. Administration on Aging.