

Aphasia

Definition:

Aphasia is an acquired communication disorder that impairs a person's ability to use or understand language. It results from damage to portions of the brain (usually in the left hemisphere) that are responsible for language. The disorder impairs the expression and understanding of language as well as reading and writing.

Description:

There are many types of aphasia, depending on the location of the lesion in the brain. It is classified in two general categories: fluent and nonfluent aphasia. Individuals who have fluent aphasia, also known as receptive aphasia, are able to physically hear words and see print but can't make sense of the words. Fluent aphasia is further broken down into Wernicke's, Conduction, Transcortical Sensory, and Anomic. Individuals who have nonfluent aphasia, also known as expressive aphasia, have difficulty saying or writing what they mean, although they know what they want to say. This category can be further broken down into Broca's, Transcortical Motor, and Global. Types of non-fluent and fluent aphasia are further characterized by their ability to understand what is said, and their ability to repeat sentences. Individuals with anomia are able to understand what is said and repeat sentences, but they have trouble using the correct word. Global aphasia is the most severe, and is characterized by having severe impairments in all language functions. The following chart further describes aphasia types according to abilities.

Good language comprehension

Difficulty understanding language

Able to repeat sentences

Difficulty repeating sentences

Characteristics:

Characteristics vary depending on the type of aphasia. The severity of aphasia depends on the extent of the area of the brain affected. A person with aphasia may:

- Have slow, effortful speech
- Speak in short or incomplete sentences and omit small words (i.e "is", "and", "the")
- Have difficulty naming common objects
- Speak in sentences that don't make sense
- Have difficulty writing and spelling
- Have difficulty reading
- Not comprehend other people's conversation
- Interpret figurative language literally
- Write sentences that don't make sense
- Be unable to recite what has been said, or repeat sentences/words
- Have difficulty pronouncing words
- Not speak spontaneously
- Have difficulty answering questions or following directions
- Use nonsense words and not realize that they don't make sense
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Individuals with aphasia may also have physical difficulties related to the lesion in the brain.

Causes:

- Stroke (most common: about 25-40% of stroke survivors acquire aphasia)
- Head injury
- Brain tumor
- Infection
- Dementia
- Other neurological causes (i.e Alzheimer's, Parkinsons)
- Temporary episodes of aphasia may occur from epilepsy, migraine, or transient ischemic attack (TIA)

Diagnosing this disorder:

If a person is suspected of having aphasia, their doctor will often refer them to have an imaging test to identify the cause. The person is then referred to a speech-language pathologist, who performs a comprehensive examination of the person's communication abilities.

Resources:

Books for kids:

- *Josh's Road to Recovery* by Kayla Hodgson
- *Nana's Stroke* by Barbara Baird

Books for Parents:

- *The Aphasia Handbook: A Guide for Stroke and Brain Injury Survivors and Their Families* by Martha Taylor Sarno, MA, MD and Joan F. Peters, Eq.
- ***Conquering Stroke* by Valerie Greene**
- More books available on aphasia.org
(http://www.aphasia.org/naa_materials/books_cds_etc.html#children)

Support Groups:

- Local chapters are available through:
 - National Aphasia Association
(http://www.aphasia.org/aphasia_community/aphasia_community_groups.html)
 - American Stroke Association & American Heart Association
(<http://www.strokeassociation.org/STROKEORG/strokegroup/public/zipFinder.jsp>)
 - Aphasia Community Groups
(http://www.aphasia.org/aphasia_community/aphasia_community_groups.html)
 - Daily Strength (<http://www.dailystrength.org/c/Aphasia/support-group>), an online aphasia support group
 - Austin community events (<http://csd.utexas.edu/research/carg/>)
 - Support groups in Colorado and Florida
(<http://www.strokeafterstroke.com/aphasiasspeechsupportgroups.php>)

Websites:

- The National Aphasia Association (NAA) (<http://www.aphasia.org/>)
- Aphasia Hope Foundation (<http://www.aphasiahope.org/>)
- Stroke Speech (<http://strokespeech.com/>) solutions for speech therapy challenges affecting stroke survivors
- Stroke After Stroke (<http://www.strokeafterstroke.com/>)
- Aphasia Research Laboratory at Boston University (<http://www.bu.edu/aphasiaresearch/>)

- Communicating with someone with aphasia
(<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/patientinstructions/000024.htm>)

Informacion en español:

- Afasia (http://www.nidcd.nih.gov/health/spanish/pages/aphasia_span.aspx)
- Comunicarse con alguien con afasia
(<http://www.nidcd.nih.gov/directory/glossaryopen.asp?term=9http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/spanish/ency/patientinstructions/000024.htm>)

References:

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Brookshire, R.H. (2003). Introduction to Neurogenic Communication Disorders.