

# COMMUNICATING WITH A PERSON WHO HAS APHASIA

## WHAT IS APHASIA

Aphasia is an impaired ability to understand language or produce speech. Aphasia is generally caused by sudden trauma to the brain e.g. due to stroke or brain injury. A person with Aphasia is also likely to experience difficulties reading and writing.

Aphasia can vary from mild, where it is hardly noticeable, to very severe where the person's communication is extremely impaired. The term Aphasia is a broad definition and the characteristics can vary greatly, however the most common types are described below. The type of Aphasia will depend on the area(s) of the brain which has been affected.

## TYPES OF APHASIA

### BROCA'S APHASIA (EXPRESSIVE OR NON-FLUENT APHASIA)

A person with Broca's Aphasia will be able to understand language easier than they will be able to express themselves. They will often communicate in short, incomplete sentences with poor grammar. They may have difficulties combining sounds to make words and as a result their speech is likely to sound forced or 'clumsy'. This is likely to cause the person a high level of frustration.

### WERNICKE'S APHASIA (RECEPTIVE OR FLUENT APHASIA)

A person with Wernicke's Aphasia is able to speak in full and complete sentences, however what they are saying may not make sense. The person with Aphasia may not realise that their sentences do not make sense and can become frustrated if people do not understand them. They may use irrelevant or inappropriate words or even made up words (this is called "jargon").

### ANOMIC APHASIA

A person with Anomic Aphasia will have difficulties finding the specific words they wish to use i.e. word finding difficulties. In particular, they may find it challenging to think of the correct verb or noun they want to use. They will understand language better than they can express themselves.

### GLOBAL APHASIA

A person with Global Aphasia will have difficulty in both their understanding and production of language. A person with Global Aphasia will have experienced damage to a wider area of the brain.



## HELPFUL STRATEGIES TO ASSIST A PERSON WITH APHASIA TO COMMUNICATE

- **Reduce background noise and distractions** when the person is speaking e.g. turn off TV or radio. Give the person your full attention.
- Give the person plenty of **time to speak**. Ensure they do not feel rushed as increased anxiety may cause the person to have more difficulty e.g. don't finish the person's sentences to speed them up.
- If you did not understand the person, don't pretend like you heard! **Be honest** and ask them to say their message again.
- Use **straightforward and simple language**. Make it clear when the topic of conversation has changed.
- Assistive devices like **communication boards** can be used to assist the person to communicate. You can find examples of communication/letter boards on our website: [nutricia.ie](https://www.nutricia.ie).
- Alternatively use a pen and paper to create your own visuals! You don't have to be a great artist - use of simple drawings can greatly aid comprehension.
- If the person has difficulty speaking, encourage them to use **non-verbal means of communication** as much as possible e.g. pointing, gestures, writing, typing on their phone.
- If the person has difficulty understanding, you can accompany your verbal language with lots of **gestures, pointing, actions and visuals**.
- If the person cannot think of the word, encourage them to use other means to describe the word e.g. what's the first sound/can you describe it/what's a similar or associated word?



Please visit [isti.ie](https://www.isti.ie) to locate a Speech and Language Therapist near you.

You can also visit [nutricia.ie](https://www.nutricia.ie), email [nutriciacare@nutricia.com](mailto:nutriciacare@nutricia.com) or Freephone 1800 923 404 for more information.