What is aphasia?

A **mini guide** for people with aphasia
and their families



SAPHASIA
South African Aphasia Group

Aphasia Guide Info

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Please note that all health care services should be based on the individual's unique needs. Use of this guide should be in conjunction with consultation from your health care team.

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Aphasia

Aphasia is a word used to describe a medical condition where a person may have difficulty talking or understanding language, as a result of damage to the brain such as a stroke.

A person with aphasia may have difficulty:

- Talking or finding the right word
- Understanding language when others are talking
- Interpreting numbers and pictures
- Reading and writing



BUT this does not mean that a person with aphasia is unable to communicate.

People with aphasia often say that the most frustrating thing about aphasia is that they have good talking days and bad talking days. On a bad talking day they might have difficulty saying a word that they were able to say the day before.



There are many different types of aphasia.

- Some people with aphasia may not be able to speak at all.
- Some people may be able to talk but find it hard for others to understand what they are saying.



It is important to remember:

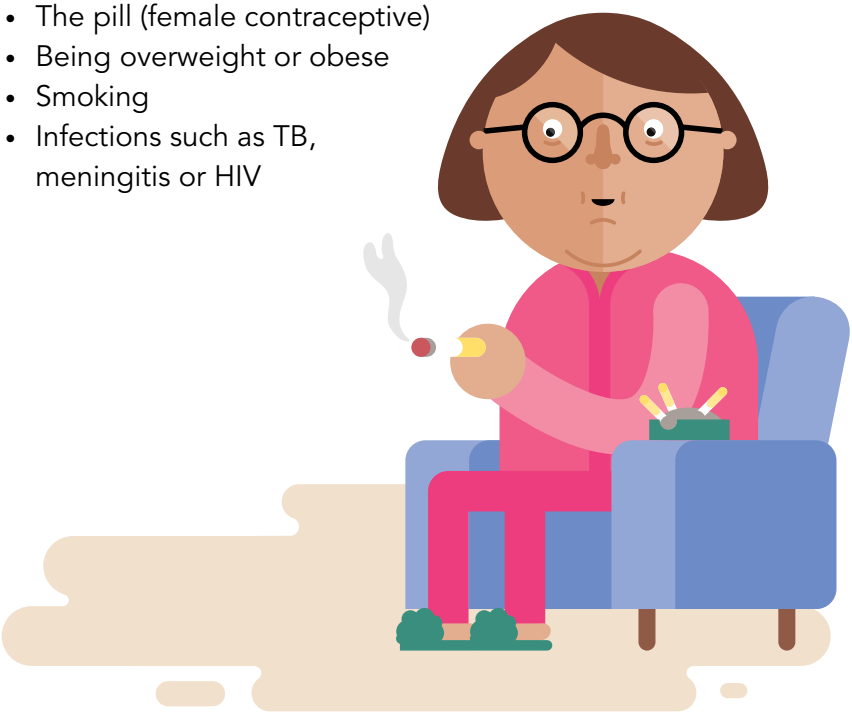
- Aphasia may change the way people with aphasia communicate, but they are still adults.
- People with aphasia are able to make their own decisions.
- The way people with aphasia communicate may have changed (i.e. they may need pictures and strategies to assist them).
- The aphasia can improve or change over time.
- Aphasia can occur at any age.

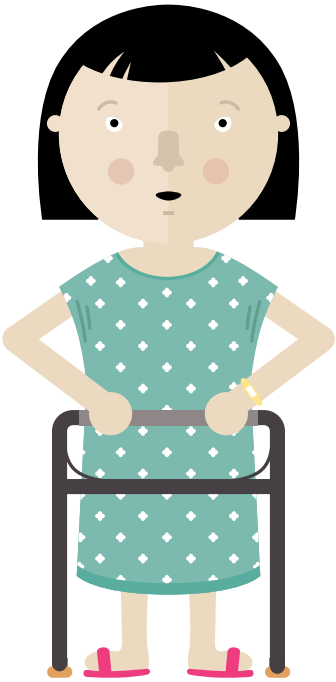
Strokes

1 in 3 people who have had a stroke will present with some form of aphasia.

Factors that put you at a higher risk of having a stroke:

- High blood pressure
- High cholesterol
- Family history of strokes or heart disease
- Diabetes
- The pill (female contraceptive)
- Being overweight or obese
- Smoking
- Infections such as TB, meningitis or HIV





A stroke can affect more than your speech. It can also affect:

- Walking
- Balance
- Vision and hearing
- Mobility
- Eating and drinking
- Emotions
- Perception
- Memory
- Attention/concentration
- Activities of daily living like washing or dressing

Who can help?

Hospital

Discuss any challenges that you are having with your doctor. You can also ask a family member or friend to come with you if you are worried about communicating all of your concerns. Your doctor will be able to refer you to the relevant health care professionals. For example, if you are losing weight and having difficulty eating, they can refer you to a speech therapist and a dietician.

Local Clinic/Referral Hospital

Your local clinic may have all the services that you need; if not your doctor may refer you to a larger hospital.

Support Group

Ask your health care professionals if they know of any support groups or resources in your community.

Stroke organisations in South Africa

Contact these organisations to find out what is happening in your area or for more information.

Heart and Stroke Foundation SA
www.heartfoundation.co.za

South African Speech-Language-Hearing Association
www.saslha.co.za

StrokeAid
www.strokeaid.co.za

Stroke Survivor Foundation
www.strokesurvivors.org.za

Headway
www.headwaygauteng.co.za



Speech Therapy



A person living with aphasia may wish to go for therapy with a speech therapist. It is important to discuss your expectations with your therapists and to set goals together.

Tips for communicating with a person with aphasia:

- Always be respectful. People living with aphasia are intellectually competent and fully capable of participating in conversation, even when their speech may be very restricted.
- Address the person with aphasia directly.
- Before starting a conversation, make sure you have the person's attention and minimise background noise.
- Keep your own voice at a normal level, unless the person has asked you to speak louder.

- Keep communication simple but at an appropriate adult level.
- Be patient and give them time to speak. Do not finish their sentences or presume you know the word they want to say.
- Some individuals living with aphasia benefit from alternative communication methods paired with speaking, like drawings, gestures, writing and facial expressions.
- When communicating with an individual with aphasia always confirm that you are communicating successfully with "yes" and "no" questions or repeat the phrase/ sentence.



Remember when you are with a health care professional you have the right to:

- Ask questions
- Ask for an interpreter
- Have your beliefs and cultural practices respected

At first I really struggled with how my life had changed but I realised that I am not alone. **Everyday I am getting stronger.** Aphasia did not take away my passion to learn and grow.
- George -

