

An aphasia diagnosis after a stroke is unplanned, unexpected, and frustrating, but it's not hopeless. **We're here to help.**

# What to Expect When You're Not Expecting Aphasia

An eBook from



There are between **2.4-4.1 MILLION** people living with aphasia in North America.

About **1/3** of our country's 800,000 annual stroke survivors will acquire aphasia, a language disorder resulting from a stroke or brain injury.



While most recover, as many as **40%** will have chronic aphasia.

Despite the frequency of the condition, many people don't know they have aphasia or how to explain it.



Because stroke often strikes without warning, we've incorporated helpful resources for caregivers and loved ones who are new to aphasia.

**Here is what to expect when you're not expecting aphasia.**

# What to Expect When You're Not Expecting Aphasia

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# 1 What is Aphasia?

Aphasia is an acquired language disorder resulting from a stroke or brain injury. It affects a person's ability to process, use, and/or understand language. Aphasia can cause frustration and stress for an individual living with it, as well as for his or her caregiver. An aphasia diagnosis is unplanned, unexpected, and frustrating, but it's not hopeless.

## MILD TO SEVERE APHASIA

The severity of aphasia depends on the degree and location of damage to the brain. The greater the severity of the aphasia, the more limited the speech and language skills. Here is what to expect with mild to severe aphasia:

### Mild aphasia:

- Individuals may have trouble understanding long messages
- Individuals may need a little extra time to understand and respond to spoken messages
- Individuals may have difficulty finding words to express or explain an idea
- Individuals may put words in the wrong order, or substitute the wrong word/part of a word when talking, for example, he or she may call a "table" a "cup"
- Individuals may have difficulty responding to questions on the spot

### Severe aphasia:

- Individuals may have trouble understanding spoken utterances
- Individuals may be unreliable in responding to "yes and no" questions
- Individuals may not be aware of their own errors
- Individuals may use a combination of words and jargon that is not understood by others.
- Individuals may have little or no speech

## What is an SLP?

A speech-language pathologist (SLP) is a highly-trained healthcare professional who evaluates and treats speech, language, and cognitive impairments as well as swallowing disorders.

Although people often think of speech and language as the same thing, the terms actually have very different meanings—speech is the physical act of making sounds to communicate; language is the cognitive ability to form letters and words together into a sentence or phrase.

SLPs must be licensed and certified to treat patients by the American Speech-Hearing-Language Association (ASHA).

SLPs are also referred to as speech therapists, speech-language therapists, and clinicians.



## 2 Types of Aphasia

If your loved one has suffered a stroke and is experiencing some language deficiencies, you may hear your health care professional describe the language loss as “Broca’s aphasia” or “Wernicke’s aphasia.”

To understand the type of aphasia your loved one may be facing, visit with your SLP or neurologist. They may classify your loved one’s language using one of the terms listed on the following pages.

### **Anomic Aphasia:**

Anomic aphasia is the least severe form of aphasia. It’s a sensation often described as having a word on the tip of your tongue.

An individual diagnosed with anomic aphasia may have significant difficulties coming up with a specific word to name objects, people, places, or events.

He or she usually understands speech well and is able to read adequately, but writing ability may be poor.

### **Broca’s Aphasia:**

Broca’s aphasia is also referred to as non-fluent or expressive aphasia. This type of aphasia can be very frustrating because the individual knows what he or she wants to say but is unable to accurately produce the correct word or sentence.

Someone with Broca’s aphasia may miss words like “it” and “is” and be limited to short statements.

### **Mixed Non-fluent Aphasia:**

Mixed non-fluent aphasia resembles a severe form of Broca’s aphasia because the individual’s speech is sparse and laborious.

Unlike Broca’s aphasia, a person with mixed non-fluent aphasia may also have limited understanding of speech and not be able to read or write beyond an elementary level.

Keep in mind that a person’s initial presenting symptoms can change with recovery, and the classification of the aphasia may change. Check with your SLP or neurologist to confirm the correct type has been identified.



**Aphasia** is a communication and language disorder, not a reflection of one's intelligence.

### **Primary Progressive Aphasia:**

Primary Progressive Aphasia, also known as PPA, is a degenerative brain and nervous system disorder that causes speaking and language skills to decline over time.

An individual who is beginning to become symptomatic with Primary Progressive Aphasia may have trouble naming objects or may misuse word endings, verb tenses, conjunctions, and pronouns. Unlike actual aphasia, which is the result of brain damage, Primary Progressive Aphasia is a progressive type of dementia.

### **Wernicke's Aphasia:**

Individuals diagnosed with Wernicke's aphasia are unaware that the words they are producing are incorrect and nonsensical.

He or she may have severe comprehension difficulties and be unable to grasp the meaning of spoken words, yet may be able to produce fluent and connected speech. Reading and writing are often severely impaired as well.



### **Global Aphasia:**

Global aphasia, as the name suggests, refers to widespread language impairment. This is the most severe form of aphasia, and usually occurs immediately after a stroke in individuals who have experienced extensive damage to the brain's language area.

A person with Global Aphasia loses almost all language function and has great difficulty understanding as well as forming words and sentences. Individuals who are suffering from Global Aphasia may only be able to produce a few recognizable words, understand little or no spoken speech, and be unable to read or write.

## 3 Ask the Clinician

Navigating an aphasia diagnosis is difficult, and you likely have many questions. Lingraphica's clinical team answers some of the most frequently asked questions about the communication disorder:

### **Q: Who gets aphasia?**

**A:** Aphasia is a communication disorder that occurs most often as a result of a stroke. It can also occur from a brain injury or dementia and age-related brain atrophy.

### **Q: What does aphasia feel like?**

**A:** Many individuals with aphasia report that it's like having a word on the tip of your tongue. Because the words are not processed as quickly as in an unimpaired individual, it's as if others are speaking very quickly. Many also say it can be frustrating and challenging to explain thoughts or feelings because the words can be scrambled or jumbled. It can be difficult to understand what individuals with aphasia are saying.

### **Q: My husband had a stroke, and many people are saying that he will eventually plateau in his recovery. Is this true?**

**A:** One of the most frustrating things for adults with aphasia is hearing from a health care professional that they've reached a "plateau" in their recovery. Often individuals first hear about the "plateau" from their physicians who, immediately after the onset of aphasia, tell families and loved ones what to expect. For years it was believed that any recovery would happen within the first six months. While many individuals make a full recovery from the initial symptoms of aphasia, as many as 40 percent develop chronic aphasia.

Research shows that adults with aphasia can continue to get better with ongoing therapy and practice. By practicing reading, writing, speaking, and listening on a daily basis, adults with aphasia can strengthen their skills. Determination, practice, and access to resources are the most important factors to regaining language skills after a stroke or brain injury.



## **Q: Does an aphasia diagnosis mean that someone's intelligence is also affected?**

**A:** Aphasia is a loss of language, not intelligence. It occurs because of damage in the left side of the brain, and the type of aphasia and extent of damage depends on precisely where in the left hemisphere the injury is focused. Depending on the location of the stroke or brain injury, an individual's language skills may be intact. Because of this, it's difficult to determine an individual's cognitive level. However, the general consensus is that the person's intelligence remains intact even if the language is impaired. Many people can still process thoughts and test well on other performance capabilities; they simply need alternative communication methods.

## **Q: I have aphasia. I have trouble speaking, but I can read and write. Is this normal?**

**A:** Aphasia affects all modalities of language to some degree. Depending on the type and severity of aphasia, it can affect speaking, listening, reading, and writing.

## **Q: Can you get better?**

**A:** The outcome of aphasia is difficult to predict, given the inconsistency of its symptoms and types. Generally, if you are younger or have less-extensive brain damage, your chances for improvement and recovery are better. In general, people with aphasia tend to recover their language processing skills more quickly than their speaking and writing skills. Recovery starts with lots of practice reading, writing, and speaking.

## **Q: I have other questions about aphasia. How can I ask my questions?**

**A:** You may call Lingraphica at 877-668-1185, Monday through Friday between 8:30 a.m. and 8 p.m. to speak with a member of our team. You may also fill out the [Contact Us](#) form on our website if you prefer, and an appropriate Lingraphica staff member will reach out to you.



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## Find Support

There are hundreds of support groups, aphasia programs and practitioners, and online groups that can be beneficial to caregivers and individuals with aphasia. [Our website](#) will get you started with some great resources.



Regardless of the approach you select, remember that there is hope.

**Individuals with aphasia can improve their communication skills and connect with family and friends again.**

Backed by nearly 30 years of experience and research, Lingraphica provides communication devices, language and communication apps, and online speech therapy to individuals who have aphasia as a result of a stroke.

Working in partnership with clinicians and caregivers, our mission is to help individuals to improve or regain their communication skills.

We believe that all individuals with language and cognitive disorders can benefit from a lifetime of affordable therapy and practice. Lingraphica is here to be a committed, reliable, and knowledgeable resource that can guide, support, and encourage individuals as they strive to communicate again.

For more information about Lingraphica, visit [www.aphasia.com](http://www.aphasia.com) or call us at 877-668-1185.



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