



## Aphasia FAQs

### What is Aphasia?

Aphasia is an **acquired communication disorder that impairs a person's ability to process language, but does not affect intelligence**. Aphasia impairs the ability to speak and understand others, and most people with aphasia experience difficulty reading and writing. The diagnosis of aphasia does NOT imply a person has a mental illness or impairment in intelligence.

### What Causes Aphasia?

The **most common cause of aphasia is stroke** (about 25-40% of stroke survivors acquire aphasia). It can also result from head injury, brain tumor or other neurological causes.

### How Common is Aphasia?

Aphasia affects about **two million Americans** and is **more common than Parkinson's Disease, cerebral palsy or muscular dystrophy**. Nearly 180,000 Americans acquire the disorder each year. However, **most people have never heard of it**.

### Who Acquires Aphasia?

While aphasia is most common among older people, it can **occur in people of all ages, races, nationalities and gender**.

### Can a Person Have Aphasia Without Having a Physical Disability?

Yes, but many people with aphasia **also have weakness or paralysis of their right leg and right arm**. When a person acquires aphasia it is **usually due to damage on the left side of the brain**, which **controls movements on the right side of the body**.

### Can People Who Have Aphasia Return to Their Jobs?

Sometimes. Since most jobs require speech and language skills, aphasia can make some types of work difficult. Individuals with mild or even moderate aphasia are sometimes able to work, but they may have to change jobs.

### How Long Does it Take to Recover from Aphasia?

If the **symptoms of aphasia last longer than two or three months after a stroke, a complete recovery is unlikely**. However, it is **important to note that some people continue to improve over a period of years and even decades**. Improvement is a **slow process that usually involves both helping the individual and family understand the nature of aphasia and learning compensatory strategies for communicating**.

### Does Aphasia Affect a Person's Intelligence?

NO. A person with aphasia **may have difficulty retrieving words and names, but the person's intelligence is basically intact**. Aphasia is not like Alzheimer's disease; for people with aphasia **it is the ability to access ideas and thoughts through language – not the ideas and thoughts themselves- that is disrupted**. But because people with aphasia have difficulty communicating, others often mistakenly assume they are mentally ill or have mental retardation.

### **Are All Cases of Aphasia Alike?**

No. There are *many types of aphasia*. Some people have difficulty speaking while others may struggle to follow a conversation. In some people, aphasia is fairly mild and you might not notice it right away. In other cases, it can be very severe, affecting speaking, writing, reading, and listening. While specific symptoms can vary greatly, what all people with aphasia have in common are difficulties in communicating.