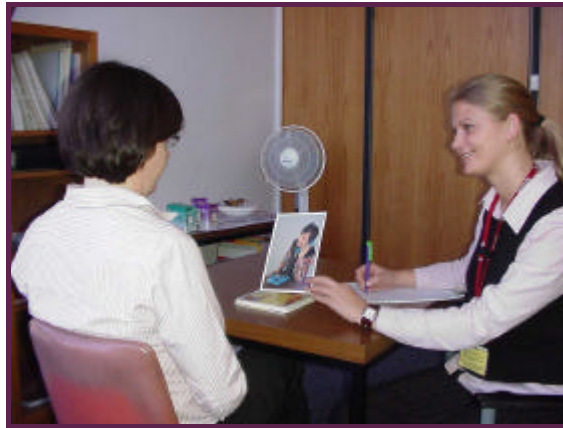


APHASIA SPEECH PATHOLOGY



WHAT IS APHASIA?

Aphasia is a disorder of language resulting from damage to the dominant hemisphere of the brain. It affects the ability to use words to express ideas and understand other people's words. In this way it is a language problem rather than a speech problem. It can affect all aspects of language including talking, understanding what others say, reading and writing. 'Aphasia' and 'Dysphasia' are often used interchangeably.

WHAT USUALLY HAPPENS WHEN WE COMMUNICATE?

When someone is about to speak, they usually go through the following process:

- Think of an idea
- Find the words
- Think of the grammar
- Create a logical sentence
- Think of the sounds to make words
- Make the right movements to make the sounds

Added to this is knowing when it is the right time to speak, keeping the tone of voice appropriate and not offending anyone, not talking too long and boring others, knowing when to use familiar versus formal language etc. For most people this happens automatically.

In order to understand what other people say, the following process occurs:

- Hear the sounds
- Recognise them as speech sounds, distinct from background noise
- Sort out the sounds into real words
- Access the meaning behind the words
- Understand the message

A similar process occurs with reading and writing except that letters are retrieved to make words rather than sounds.

SYMPTOMS OF APHASIA

Word Finding/ Retrieval: A very common problem in aphasia is being unable to find the right words to say. Normally our brains have a very organised storage system for words, similar to a huge filing cabinet full of words, each one filed away in exactly the right place.

Having aphasia is like the filing cabinet being turned upside down and all the words ending up in a huge disorganised pile. When looking for the right word to say or write, the person with aphasia often cannot match a word to the idea that they have. Some people may not be able to find the word at all, or they might retrieve a word that sounds similar to the one they want. In some cases the words produced may be non-sense words.

Understanding: In the same way aphasia disrupts the ability to match a word to an idea, it also disrupts the same ability in reverse. Therefore, it may be hard to understand what has been heard or read. This may range from difficulty recognising letters to words to understanding sentences and paragraphs. If comprehension is affected it will often affect both reading and listening to some degree.

Grammar: Aphasia can disrupt the ability to use the correct grammar, eg: “Sally?, he go pub”, instead of, “Sally? She’s gone to the pub” (this affects language input – listening or reading, and language output – talking and writing).

In summary, aphasia is the loss of the ability to use words to communicate, whether it involves understanding through listening or reading, or producing words through speech or writing.

WHAT CAN BE DONE?

Aphasia presents in many different ways. For example, a client may produce fluent nonsense words, and be unaware that anything is wrong, or they may understand well and be able to produce no speech at all. A Speech Pathologist is especially trained in diagnosing and treating aphasia. A Speech Pathologist can determine the pattern of the particular aphasia and design a suitable therapy programme to meet the particular needs of each individual person.

Aphasia occurs as a result of damage to the brain. As with other symptoms of brain damage, for example, paralysis, language may not fully recover. Speech Pathology focuses on maximising language skills so that the person with aphasia can communicate as effectively as possible. This may include introducing alternative methods of communication such as picture boards or mechanical devices.

For further information contact your Speech Pathologist at the Royal Rehabilitation Centre Sydney on 02 9807 1144