

COGNITIVE – COMMUNICATION IMPAIRMENTS (SPEECH PATHOLOGY)

COGNITIVE – COMMUNICATION

Communication is a highly complex skill that we use in many different ways in our lives every day. It is probably the most complex skill that humans ever learn, so it stands to reason that it can be easily disrupted when the brain is damaged by a head injury, stroke or other trauma.



WHAT IS COGNITIVE – COMMUNICATION?

Cognitive communication is a term, which encompasses many language skills, which are more complex than just retrieving words or forming sentences. It includes spoken and written expression and understanding, verbal and non-verbal aspects of communication such as tone of voice and facial expression.

HOW DO WE USE IT?

There are many different levels of communication in everyday life, for example:

- **Social speech:** informal, 'hello', 'goodbye', 'how are you?'
- **Light conversation:** at a party
- **Language at work:** technical, teaching, jargon
- **Highly academic language:** lecturing

These levels require us to use language in different ways depending on the context. We may want to communicate a simple message or explain a complex procedure. We have to be able to understand as well as express ourselves clearly.

There are other variables to consider when thinking about **cognitive-communication** skills. Everybody's language is different according to his or her level of education, age and life experience. It may be appropriate to be loud and boisterous with a group of friends, but inappropriate to behave like this at work.

As there are so many aspects to our use of language there are many different combinations of problems that can occur when something goes wrong/the brain is damaged.

SYMPTOMS OF COGNITIVE COMMUNICATION IMPAIRMENTS

1. Naming

There may be problems quickly retrieving more unusual words, or thinking of alternatives for words. Relationships between words such as opposites or categories may be disrupted.

2 Explaining (Verbal & Written)

This is commonly an area of difficulty, as it requires different skills to put a message together coherently and express it clearly. It may result in an inability to explain simple

procedures such as how to make coffee or more complex ideas like expressing a reasoned opinion.

3. Auditory/Reading Comprehension

There may be difficulty understanding complex or abstract material, with misinterpretation of information being the result. Increasing the speed and length of material can also make it more difficult to understand.

4 Verbosity

Talking too much about the same topic and not identifying when the listener is bored.

5 Inappropriate Style or Content

Being over familiar or overly formal in language usage and non verbal skills. Saying things that others may find rude or embarrassing.

6. Social Skills

Difficulty with knowing how to start, continue or finish a conversation. Poor use of body language and facial expression to assist with getting your message across.

7 Topic Maintenance

Difficulty staying on the topic when talking. Introducing new , irrelevant topics or ideas into the conversation.

8. Planning

Difficulty planning and organising a message into a coherent sequence.

9. Attention/Concentration/memory

Difficulty listening and concentrating on a task, forgetting what has been said or what you are about to say. Being unable to concentrate on what someone is saying usually means it is difficult to remember it.

10. Lack of insight

Difficulty identifying and acknowledging deficits, even if reminded continuously, may result in added problems for the individual or relatives and friends. Poor insight may make therapy more difficult.

WHAT CAN BE DONE?

As cognitive communication impairments co-occur with cognitive problems, assessments by the Neuropsychologist and Speech Pathologist are recommended. If a client recognises there is a problem and is able to learn, therapy is much more likely to be effective. The Speech Pathologist will design a program to maximise communication potential taking into account the factors described above. Therapy may take the form of a group or individual sessions with assignments to complete between sessions. A client is expected to work a great deal on their impairment in their own time in order for therapy to be effective. The family is an important partner in therapy and is provided with education and strategies to help optimise communication effectiveness.

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