



Primary Progressive Aphasia

What is Primary Progressive Aphasia?

Primary Progressive Aphasia is a disorder of speech and language function in which language progressively deteriorates over a period of years. It is caused by a degenerative disease of the language centres of the brain. It may affect all aspects of communication such as understanding, speaking, reading and writing. Reading and writing skills may be better preserved than verbal skills. Memory, reasoning, insight and judgment are not affected, at least in the early stages.

It is important to get an accurate diagnosis. In particular, it is useful to find out whether the person's language is the only thing affected or whether memory and reason are also affected. In other degenerative brain disorders, such as Alzheimer's Disease, other functions of the brain as well as the language centres are affected.

A consultant or other doctor usually makes the diagnosis. Often a neurologist will be involved. A speech and language therapist can also contribute to making an accurate diagnosis by assessing language compared to 'cognitive' skills such as memory.

Will it get better?

Primary Progressive Aphasia is a progressive condition and communication skills will, therefore, deteriorate over time. This may happen slowly over a period of years. Currently there is no cure for Primary Progressive Aphasia.

How can I make communication easier?

The following are some suggestions that may make communication easier.

BEFORE YOU START

- Reduce background noise and distractions: turn off the radio or TV or, if possible, go to a quiet room.
- Get the person's attention. You may need to touch their arm or say their name.

WHEN YOU ARE TALKING

- It may be helpful to write things down.
- Use pictures or photographs as this may help to make sure you both know the topic of conversation (see below).
- Give only one piece of information at a time.
- Allow extra time for them to take in what you say.

WHEN THE PERSON WITH APHASIA IS TALKING

- Look out for their facial expressions and body language - they may give you 'clues' about their feelings.
- Encourage them to use mimes, drawing or writing if they have difficulty getting the words out.
- Allow extra time for them to get their message across.

USE A COMMUNICATION BOOK

- Communication books are often useful if speech is poor.
- Small photograph albums can be used as a communication book.
- A book can be made up with key sentences, pictures and photographs.
- A communication book can be as simple or complex as the person with Aphasia wishes.
- Can be adapted as the needs of the person with Aphasia change.

Where can I get help?

If you are concerned about someone with deteriorating communication skills, they need to see a doctor as there are several things which may be causing the problem. The GP is the best person to ask initially. S/he may refer them to a specialist. This might be a consultant in Neurology, Psychiatry or Care of Older People.

Other people who may be able to help are:

- *A Psychologist* – who can assess skills such as memory and advise on strategies to help you cope with the change.
- *A Social Worker* – who can advise you on your rights and benefits. Some Social Workers also offer counselling.
- *A Speech and Language Therapist* – can assess communication difficulties and advise you on the strategies to make the most of communication skills. They should monitor communication skills and advise on how to maintain them. They may be able to advise you on whether a communication aid would be useful.