



What is Loss of Speech?

'Loss of speech' is a common way of describing a language disability, which is a hidden impairment. Most people with Aphasia do not lose speech entirely; rather, they have disrupted speech, sometimes quite severely and are able to access only one or two words.

It is important to understand which term is being used and why:

- **Speech** The communication or expression of thoughts in spoken words, the utterance of vocal sounds conveying ideas.
- **Language** The systematic means of communicating using conventionalised sounds, gestures or marks.
- **Communication** The use of a common system of sounds, symbols, signs or behaviours for the exchange of information.
- **Voice** Sound produced by forcing air from the lungs through the larynx.

Examples of communication impairments:

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| • Aphasia Difficulty in using and understanding language, although thought and hearing process remaining intact. | • Dysarthria Articulation problems resulting from weak muscles in the throat and mouth.

Results in slurred speech and poor breath control when speaking. |
| • Aphonia Loss of voice | • Dysphonia An impairment to the voice (e.g. chronic hoarseness). |
| • Dyspraxia Difficulty in co-ordinating muscles to produce speech. | • Dyslexia Difficulty with reading, spelling and written language. |

Most people who lose their speech are still able to communicate. They may have to use a Communication Aid to do so.

Speakability is concerned with Aphasia, a complex condition, the degree and exact nature of which varies considerably and can manifest itself differently from day-to-day. Aphasia is likely to be more disabling when someone is tired or unwell.

Aphasia is often divided into two main types:

1. Difficulty in understanding speech
2. Difficulty with finding words and putting sentences together.

However, many people will experience a combination of both types, but the severity will vary and so it may be helpful to think in terms of a spectrum of difficulties.

In order to find out where the difficulty lies and the severity of the impairment, it is important that the person is assessed by a Speech and Language Therapist.

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