Aphasia

Aphasia is an acquired language disorder that may impact speaking, listening, reading, and/or writing skills. Aphasia is caused by damage to the areas of the brain (typically on the left side) that operate language functions. The most common cause of aphasia is stroke, but it may also be caused by head injury, illness, or neurological disease. Initial signs and symptoms may include difficulty selecting the correct word or sentences to say or write. It may also result in difficulty understanding spoken conversation or written information. Other conditions that may accompany aphasia include slurred speech, impaired coordination of speech sounds, difficulty swallowing and/or weakness on one side of the body.

The nature of the language impairment depends upon the severity and location of the damage, as well as a person’s unique language storage structure. Aphasia may be as mild as the occasional difficulty coming up with a person’s name, to as severe as being unable to form any words or understand simple questions. There are different types of aphasia classified based on the location of the damage and the parts of language that are affected. Some examples of types of aphasia include, Wernicke’s Aphasia, Broca’s Aphasia, or Global Aphasia. It is important to note aphasia does not affect intelligence or motor functions.

While a physician will determine if you have had a stroke or a brain injury, a speech language pathologist will evaluate your speaking, listening, reading, and/or writing skills to identify strengths and weaknesses in those language abilities. Personal goals will be identified and then a plan will be developed to help rebuild language connections in the brain and teach the person strategies to compensate for the deficits. Therapy tasks may be as basic as naming objects, following one-step directions, answering yes/no questions, or incorporating gestures and drawing to communicate. Tasks may also be more advanced and target conversational speech, use of a script, or strategies for reading a newspaper. All goals are developed based on the person’s individual needs and preferences with the focus on helping the person return to the highest quality of life possible.