

Learning about Apraxia

One of a series of pamphlets about Speech after Stroke

Learning about Apraxia

A stroke is damage to part of the brain. It happens when a blood vessel in the brain gets blocked or when it bursts.

A stroke can cause many different problems, depending on the part and amount of the brain that is damaged.

This pamphlet explains the effect on speech called **apraxia**.

People with apraxia after a stroke know what they want to say, but the sounds come out “jumbled up”. Sometimes the wrong sounds come out, sometimes they are in the wrong order, and sometimes the sounds do not come out at all. The harder they try, the worse it seems to get!

People who just have apraxia are able to think just fine. In fact, they can understand you and they know exactly what they want to tell you.

Most importantly, their intelligence has not changed.

Their speech does sound unusual though. This is because their stroke has made it hard for their brain to “translate” thoughts into the tongue and lip movements needed to speak.

So what can you do to help?

The best thing to do is to speak with the person who has had the stroke, as well as to his/her speech-language pathologist. They will be able to give you specific ideas about how you can help.

Here are some suggestions to keep in mind when speaking with a person with apraxia:

- ✓ Stay relaxed and allow the person enough time to speak – the apraxia will get worse if the person is rushed or excited.
- ✓ Make sure the topic of conversation is clearly established.
- ✓ Encourage the person to use different ways of “speaking” – like pointing, gesturing, drawing simple pictures, or writing some words down. Using this suggestion is like giving someone a cane to help them walk.
- ✓ If you still cannot understand, try asking questions which can be answered by “yes” or “no”. Or, ask questions with choices, such as “would you like coffee or tea?”

More suggestions ...

- ✓ Try not to shout. Apraxia does not affect a person’s hearing.
- ✓ Do not be too picky. If you understood the person’s message, do not worry if it was not spoken perfectly.

If you would like more information, please call the Speech-Language Pathologist below:

This series was written by Justine Lear and Deidre Sperry, Speech- Language Pathologists.