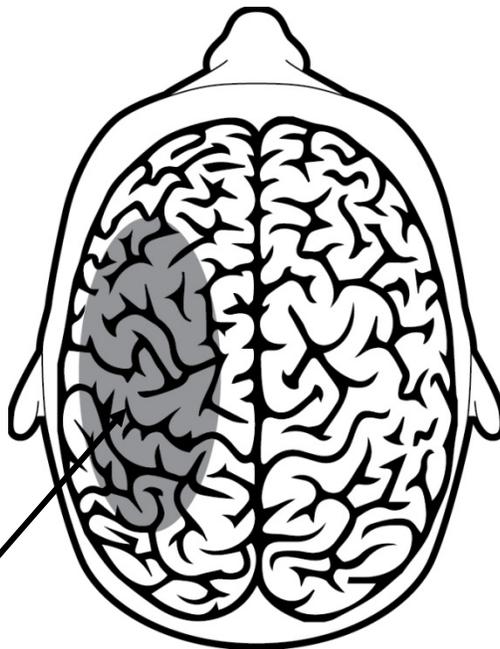


Learning about Aphasia: Understanding Speech after Stroke

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

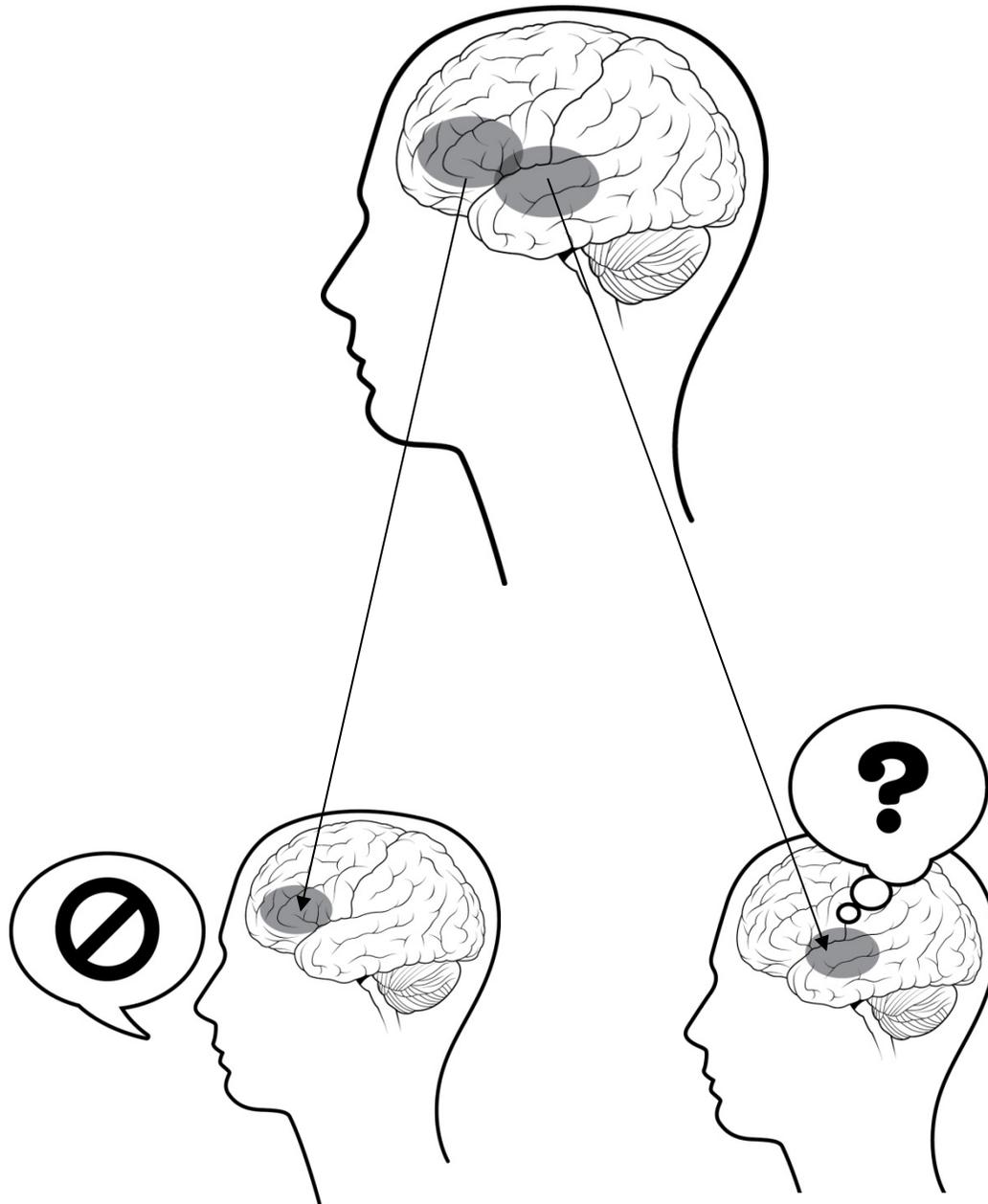
A stroke can cause many different problems, depending on the part and amount of the brain that is damaged.



Part of the brain
that is damaged

One effect on speech is called aphasia. The word “aphasia” is like the word “stroke” – it can mean many different things.

Aphasia can affect a person’s speaking and understanding.



Difficulty speaking

Difficulty understanding

Aphasia can also affect a person's reading or writing.



Reading



Writing

This handout explains a stroke's effect on understanding.

Some people have severe aphasia and can hardly understand any words or sentences. Other people have mild aphasia and may only have difficulty understanding a fast conversation with a group of people.

Aphasia affects a person's ability to understand words and sentences. It does not affect a person's intelligence. People with aphasia are competent adults who know more than they can say.

The stroke has just made it hard for his/her brain to "translate" your words and sentences into thoughts.

To help you understand what this is like, imagine yourself in a foreign country where you do not speak the language. You will have a lot of trouble understanding what people say to you. But you would not think you had suddenly lost your intelligence!

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 their 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 aphasia:

- ✓ Speak a little slower. Sometimes all the person needs is some extra time to figure out the meaning of your words.
- ✓ Use shorter sentences. A long, “run-on” sentence is difficult to follow at the best of times!
- ✓ If you are unsure, check with the person to make sure he/she understood what you said.

More suggestions ...

- ✓ If you have a pen and paper handy, try writing down key words as you speak. This way, the person can always look at the words a second or third time if they have not understood.
- ✓ Drawing may also aid understanding.
- ✓ Use pictures, photos or other objects in the environment to help the person understand.
- ✓ Use gestures and facial expressions, and point to what you are talking about. This way, if the person does not understand your words, they may understand your gestures.
- ✓ Try not to shout. Aphasia does not affect a person’s hearing. In fact, shouting can make it more difficult to understand.

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