



FACT SHEET

Brain Injury & Language

*Do you
have
trouble
using
language
since
your
brain
injury?*

What does this mean?

When certain brain functions controlling the ability to use language are affected, a person might experience difficulties understanding what others are saying or putting their thoughts into words. They might be extremely frustrated at their inability to get their points across or to understand what people are telling them.

How might a brain injury affect communication?

Injury to certain parts of the brain can cause persons with traumatic brain injury to have difficulty understanding and expressing words and language. Problems of this type are called “aphasia.” This can range from very mild, in which case it is only a little frustrating at times, to very severe, in which case it makes communication difficult or impossible.

Common examples of communication difficulties:

- ◆ Difficulty thinking of the right word.
- ◆ Trouble following conversations or understanding what others say.
- ◆ Difficulty with more complex language skills, such as expressing thoughts in an organized manner. You know what you want to say, but the words come out wrong.
- ◆ Trouble communicating thoughts and feelings using facial expressions, tone of voice and body language (non-verbal communication).
- ◆ Having problems reading others’ emotions and not responding appropriately to another person’s feelings or to the social situation.
- ◆ Misunderstanding jokes or sarcasm.

Recommended strategies:

Work with a speech therapist to identify areas that need work. Communication problems can keep improving for a long time after the injury.

How family members or caregivers can help:

- ◆ Use kind words and a gentle tone of voice. Be careful not to “talk down” to the person.
- ◆ When talking with the injured person, periodically stop and ask if he or she understands what you are saying, or ask the person a question to determine if he or she understood what you said.
- ◆ Do not speak too fast or say too much at once.
- ◆ Develop a signal (like raising a finger) that will let the injured person know when he or she has gotten off topic. Practice this ahead of time. If signals don’t work, try saying “We were talking about...”
- ◆ Limit conversations to one person at a time.

Sources: IU School of Medicine / Rehabilitation Hospital of Indiana TBI Model Systems. Further, the information in this FACT SHEET is also based on a consensus of expert opinion of the Rehabilitation Hospital of Indiana Departments of Neuropsychology and Resource Facilitation.

Disclaimer: This information is not meant to replace advice from a medical professional. You should consult your health care provider regarding specific medical concerns or treatments.

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