



Communication after a brain injury

After a brain injury, a person may find communication more difficult some times than others. This handout will help you learn about some of the reasons why your loved one may be having trouble communicating with you and how you can help.

Communication changes after a brain injury

A brain injury is damage to the brain. It can happen inside of the brain, like a stroke, or outside of the brain, like damage from hitting your head during a car accident.

A person's ability to communicate can change after a brain injury. It can affect a person's ability to speak, understand, read, write and even make gestures such as a head nod.

Changes in the ability of your loved one to communicate depend on the where and how much damage was done to the brain. Some people can speak as they did before, while others may not be able to speak at all. Some people can speak, but have difficulty using the proper words, pronouncing them, or may even make up words.

What can cause changes in my loved one's ability to communicate?

Here are some reasons why your loved one may be having difficulty communicating with you.

Pain

When a person with a brain injury is in pain, it can affect his or her ability to communicate. Pain can limit concentration and attention needed for communication. Some people with a brain injury use body parts to communicate, such as blinking twice for "yes". If the body part is sore, their ability to use it decreases.

Illness

An illness can also affect a person's communication. Simply not feeling well can affect a person's desire to communicate. With some illnesses, such as pneumonia or a urinary tract infection, a person with a brain injury may not be able to concentrate or respond to you like they usually do.

Medication

Many medications can affect communication. Fatigue, drowsiness, and even slurred-sounding speech can be effects of some medications. If a person communicates with body parts, some medication can make it harder to move them in the usual way.

Mood

Sometimes a person with a brain injury may not feel like communicating. Coming to terms with an injury can be emotionally difficult. Pain, illness and medication can also affect a person's mood.

Fatigue

Fatigue or feeling very tired is common for a person with a brain injury, especially soon after the injury. A lot of rest is needed throughout the recovery process. He or she may not feel like communicating when tired, or respond in the usual way. A change in routine, visits from friends and family, physical activities, medications and illness can cause fatigue.

Understanding

After a brain injury, a person can have problems understanding speech. A person may not respond as usual if they do not understand. Long sentences and unclear topics can be especially challenging.

What can I do to help?

Here are some ways to help you communicate with your loved one:

- Understand that a person with a brain injury may communicate better at some times than others.
- Allow the person rest when they appear fatigued.
- Stay relaxed and focus on the person's message, not on how it is delivered.
- If you have difficulty understanding the person, try asking questions which can be answered with "yes" or "no".
- Speak with the person, not over them. Even if it seems like the person is not responding, they may still hear and understand you.
- If you cannot understand what the person is saying, do not pretend that you do. Apologize for not understanding and let them know you will try another time.
- Use short, clear sentences. Establish the topic of conversation, such as stating "I am talking about the cold weather".
- Use hand gestures, facial expressions and/or touch to help the person understand. For example, touch the person's hand while saying, "raise this hand".
- Always speak to the person with a positive tone. Sharing funny or happy stories can be uplifting.
- Share your concerns, questions or observations with staff members involved in the person's care.

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

_____ Ext. _____
