Adult Aphasia
What is aphasia?

- Aphasia is a language disorder.
- It can cause problems with
  - Understanding
  - Speaking
  - Reading
  - Writing
- Thinking (cognitive) skills are usually good.
What causes aphasia?

• Aphasia is caused by brain damage from stroke or head injury.
• Damage is usually to the left side of the brain.
• This is where language centers are located in most people.
Diagram of the Brain
What are the types of aphasia?

• Everyone with aphasia will have different skills and different problems.
• Problems will depend on the type of brain injury and how severe it is.
• The general types are
  – expressive aphasia
  – receptive aphasia
  – global aphasia
What is expressive aphasia?

- People with expressive aphasia have trouble speaking and writing. They may
  - only be able to say one or two words at a time
  - have trouble thinking of the words they want to say
  - leave words out of sentences
  - have problems spelling words
  - have trouble putting together sentences that make sense
What is receptive aphasia?

• People with receptive aphasia have trouble understanding and reading. They may
  – Be able to follow only simple directions
  – Have trouble following conversation
  – Need to have information repeated
  – Need visual or touch cues to help them understand
  – Have trouble understanding what they read
  – Say words that don’t make sense but not know that others can’t understand them
What is global aphasia?

• Global aphasia is the most severe type of aphasia.
• People with global aphasia have a lot of trouble with speaking, writing, understanding, and reading.
• Their skills may vary
  – They may be better at understanding than at speaking.
More about aphasia...

• Most people with aphasia will have some
  – Trouble with speaking, writing, understanding, and/or reading.

• The types of problems will be very different for each person
How is aphasia different from other speech problems?

• When we communicate, we use both speech and language.
  – Speech is how we say sounds and put them together into words.
  – Language is the words we use and understand

• Stroke and brain injury can cause speech problems, including
  – dysarthria
  – apraxia
What is dysarthria?

- Dysarthria
  - Is caused by muscle weakness or tightness
  - May cause people to
    - Slur their words
    - Not be able to speak loudly
    - Sound like they are talking out of their nose (nasality)
What is apraxia?

• Apraxia
  – Is caused by problems getting speech muscles to do what the brain wants them to do
  – May cause people to
    • Mix up sounds in words
    • Say the wrong sounds
    • Say words and sounds differently every time they try to say them
    • Struggle to say sounds
What else do I need to know about aphasia?

• People with aphasia can also have dysarthria or apraxia
• It can be hard to know if aphasia, dysarthria, or apraxia are causing the most problems.
• A person’s skills may improve as the brain heals
  – It may take days or months
  – Improvement soon after the stroke is called spontaneous recovery
Can a person with aphasia have other problems, too?

- A person who has had a stroke or brain injury may have
  - Weakness or numbness on one side of the body
  - Trouble seeing
  - Problems remembering things
  - Trouble solving problems or thinking clearly
  - Problems chewing and swallowing food and drink, called dysphagia
What if a person speaks more than one language?

• If a person learned two languages at the same time
  – Both languages are most likely located in the same part of the brain
  – They will probably have trouble in both languages
What if a person speaks more than one language? (continued)

• If a person learned one language before the second
  – The languages may be located in different parts of the brain
  – They may have trouble in only one language, or in both
What help is available for a person with aphasia?

• A speech-language pathologist, or SLP, is trained to work with people who have speech and language problems like aphasia.
• SLPs work in hospitals, rehabilitation, nursing homes, clinics, and private practice, and may go to a person’s home.
What help is available for a person with aphasia? (continued)

- Support groups and stroke clubs may be available
  - People with aphasia can meet and learn from each other
  - Spouses and other caregivers can get support, too.
How does an SLP help?

• SLPs can
  – Test people to see what they do well and what is hard to do
  – Work with the person on the problems he or she is having
  – Teach the person with aphasia and his or her family ways to communicate more easily
  – Help find other ways to communicate (called augmentative and alternative communication, or AAC) if the person can’t talk
What resources are available?

• For more information about aphasia and other speech, language, and swallowing disorders, go to ASHA’s Web site, www.asha.org/public/.

• Other organizations include
  – American Stroke Association
    www.strokeassociation.org
  – Aphasia Hope Foundation
    www.aphasiahope.org
  – National Aphasia Association
    www.aphasia.org