

# Can't find the right word or talk too much...?

## What is communication?

Communication is the ability to talk to others in a way that they can understand. It is also about understanding what other people say to us. Communication is about when we talk, who we talk to, how long we talk for, what we say and what we don't say.

Communication needs a number of skills that involve different areas of the brain. The location of the tumour in the brain will affect the sorts of communication difficulties a person may experience.

## How will I know if I have a problem with communication?

Communication problems can include difficulties with:

- Being able to think of particular words.
- Understanding more complicated or abstract language.
- Slowed or slurred speech that is hard to understand.
- Focusing during conversations, not listening.
- Following information given in a conversation.
- Recalling conversations after they have happened.
- Organising your ideas in a conversation.
- Keeping a conversation going.
- Talking too much.
- Keeping the tone or volume of your voice at a normal level.
- Picking up on social cues from others (for example when the person you are talking to is bored or upset).
- Making comments or asking questions which could be considered rude.
- Talking about topics which may not be appropriate for the situation.
- Problems with reading or writing.

- Making things up.
- Picking up when other people are making a joke or are being sarcastic.

## 'Helen's' Story

'Helen' has shown a number of problems with her communication since her brain tumour diagnosis. She tends to put too much detail in her stories and does not notice when people are bored. Though 'Helen' is able to listen to others and remember what they say she does not pick up when people are being sarcastic or seems unable to detect lies. She also tends to talk non-stop and not give the other person a chance to talk. 'Helen' rarely asks questions and has a tendency to interrupt when other people are talking, often talking over the top of them. People try to avoid her in social situations and she tends to latch onto people, especially new people, who are often at a loss in how to deal with 'Helen's' non-stop talking.

## Strategies

Successful communication will need the person with a brain tumour and their family and friends to work together. You can talk about these strategies together.

## To think of words or names:

- Describe the word you are unable to think of in a different way. This will help the other person to know what you are talking about. It may also help you to think of the word yourself.
- Family and friends can help by saying the correct word as part of the conversation if you are unable to think of it.
- Link the names of people you meet

## KEY FACTS

In a survey, the carers of people with a brain tumour found that:

- 26% of their relatives 'sometimes or frequently' interrupted the conversation or talked out of turn.
- 21% had some difficulties with communication, such as trouble finding words or having a tendency to ramble.

with another person of the same name or with a word that sounds the same as their name (Mr Jones – phones).

## To follow people who use complicated words or ideas:

- Let the other person know if you did not understand (e.g. Can you break that down for me? Could you write it down?)
- If in a group setting (e.g. work meeting or class), write down questions that you can ask the person at a later time.
- Family members and friends should aim to talk in a way that is easy to follow (for example, break down information into smaller chunks, using examples to explain what you mean).

## Difficulty speaking clearly:

- Have conversations in a quiet place.
- Tell people up front the topic that you want to talk about – giving the big picture will make it easier to follow the smaller details.
- If someone doesn't understand a word, try to explain it in a different way. If needed, try another way - spelling the word or writing it down.

### **Getting distracted while speaking to someone:**

- Aim to have any important conversations in a quiet place.
- Prompt yourself to keep focused on the conversation. Ask yourself, "Am I really listening?"
- Think of questions you can use which follow on from what the person is saying. This will help to keep you focussed.
- Spell out the reason for the conversation at the start. This can help you to keep track until the end.

### **To follow what the other person has told you:**

- Don't be afraid to check with people to make sure you understand what they are saying (for example, ask 'So what you are saying is...?').
- Family and friends can sum up what has been said at the end to make sure you have got the important points.

### **To recall a conversation after it has happened:**

- Write down the important points. You can then look back to it at the end of the conversation.
- Use a diary to help you keep track of appointments or things to do that people tell you about. Family and friends can help by reminding you to put information in your diary, if you have a problem remembering to do this.
- Family and friends may need to tell you the information again after the conversation has ended. This way, you do not have to try to remember it all.

### **Difficulty organising your ideas in a conversation:**

- Ask others to let you know whether you are getting your message across clearly (for example, ask 'Does that make sense?').

- Family and friends can help by organising the conversation using their questions as "subheadings" (For example, asking 'What do you want to do this weekend? Who will you go with?').
- Solve problems by talking them through with family or friends, as it may be hard to come up with an answer on your own.

### **To keep a conversation going:**

- Listen to the news and make a note of interesting topics that you can talk about with others.
- Plan before social events the topics you can use in talking with the people who will be there. Family and friends can also help you come up with ideas.
- Aim to keep conversations going by using follow-up questions or comments.

### **Talking too much in a conversation:**

- Aim to have a two-way conversation. If you have been talking more than the other person, use a question or stop talking for a bit so that they can have their turn.
- Family and friends can also help when they need to have a turn in the conversation (For example, by saying 'Hang on, I just wanted to add in what I think about...').

### **Making comments or asking questions, which could be considered rude or talking about topics that may not be appropriate for the situation:**

- Check whether what you are about to say is the right thing for the situation. If it isn't right, you can think it, but don't say it.
- Family and friends can help with working out the right sort of questions to ask before social situations.

- Use a short phrase to help yourself communicate successfully (for example, 'Stay in control, Hang in there, Be serious'). If needed, your family or friends can use it to remind you.

### **Questions to ask your health professional**

- What is the cause of the communication difficulties?
- Is it related to the tumour itself?
- Is it related to the treatments given for the tumour or other medications?
- Could the communication difficulties be an unrelated medical condition and does this need treatment in itself?
- Do I/we expect the communication difficulties to get better or worse over time?
- Are there any medications that can help the problem?
- Are there any diet or lifestyle factors that can help the communication difficulties?
- Will a psychologist or a speech therapist be able to help treat this problem?
- Who else could I speak with to help with the communication difficulties?

### **Links to other information:**

- <http://braininjury.org.au/portal/fact-sheets/communication-disorders---fact-sheet.html>