

June 28, 1989

Help aphasics communicate

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For The Coloradoan

Asking for a glass of water is simple. But to victims of aphasia, a request for water can turn into a jumble of meaningless syllables that end in frustration and isolation.

Feeling helpless, family and friends chatter endlessly, avoid and aphasic, or pretend nothing is wrong. But with a few guidelines from the National Stroke Association, most can learn to communicate with an aphasic friend or loved one.

Aphasia, an inability to communicate due to stroke or other brain injury, can affect speech, understanding, or reading and writing. If you understand where the victim has difficulty, you can help.

Seniors

For instance, if the aphasic can't speak well, encourage him or her to write the message, read it out loud, or point to a picture. Try tapping out syllables on his or her arm, or sing the words with him or her. Sometimes a simple tune can aid speech.

Some aphasics, while they understand speech directed to them, can't acknowledge it with a nod of the head or a gesture. You can help by guiding the aphasic's head in a nodding gesture, or you can use a mirror to let him or her imitate your gesture.

If someone you know is having difficulty understanding, try a

few of the NSA's suggestions to clarify your message:

- Speak directly to the aphasic patient.

- Keep TV, radio, and background conversation to a minimum.

- Gesture, point and act out while you speak.

- Use pictures and objects to show what you mean.

- Use shorter sentences, but don't talk down to the victim.

- Write your message as you say it.

- Repeat your message.

- Speak slowly and clearly. But don't shout.

For more information on aphasia, write to the National Stroke Association, 1420 Ogden St., Denver, CO 80218. Or call 1-893-1992.