the Advocacy Alliance
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NORTHEASTERN PENNSYLVANIA
HEALTH CARE QUALITY UNIT

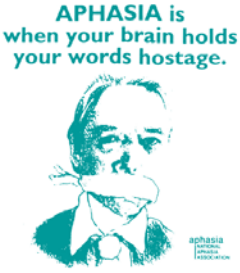
It's Your Health

Summer 2008

June is National Aphasia Awareness Month

Aphasia is an acquired communication disorder that impairs a person's ability to process language, but does not affect intelligence. Aphasia impairs the ability to speak and understand others and most people with aphasia experience difficulty reading and writing.

The most common cause of aphasia is stroke, although it can also result from head injury, brain tumor or other neurological causes. The anatomy of the brain that governs speech and language is located in the left side of the brain. It is associated with speech production and articulation. Our ability to articulate ideas, as well as use words accurately in spoken and written language, has been attributed to this crucial area. The left side of the brain controls movements on the right side of the brain. Many people with aphasia have weakness or paralysis of their right leg and right arm.



People who have aphasia can think clearly but have difficulty getting messages in and out. They know what they think and feel, but can't get to the words. If you have aphasia you are still a competent adult. You know what you want to say, you are not deaf and you can make your own decisions.

Granted, for persons living with aphasia, unsatisfactory or failed communications often frustrate everyone involved. Acceptance comes with an increased understanding of how aphasia disrupts all forms of verbal communication. Patience encourages calm perseverance. Any number of emotional or physical states may compromise routine speaking, listening, reading or writing abilities.

No medicine or drugs have been known to cure aphasia. Speech therapy is often provided to the person with aphasia. Whenever possible, continue normal activities (such as dinner with family, company, going out). Try to involve the person with aphasia in family decisions, informing them of events but avoiding burdening them with day to day details.

It is important to note that some people with aphasia continue to improve over a period of years and even decades. Improvement is a slow process that usually involves both helping the person and family understand the nature of aphasia and learning other strategies for communicating.

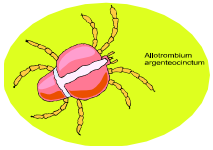
Communications Do's and Don'ts

- **Talk to the person as an adult - NOT as a child.**
- **Minimize or eliminate background noise.**
- **Encourage and use all modes of communication.**
- **Have the person's attention before communicating.**
- **Give the person time to talk and permit a reasonable amount of time to respond.**
- **Accept all communication attempts.**

Summer Safety Quiz

Mosquitoes spread Lyme's Disease.	**True or False**
When packing up to go to the beach you may want to take plenty of caffeinated drinks to stay hydrated.	**True or False**
Sunscreen should be applied 30 minutes before going outdoors and should be reapplied at least every two hours.	**True or False**
Having a light skin color, light hair or light eye color may put you at increased risk of getting skin cancer.	**True or False**
If a bee sting causes swelling in another part of the body, other than where the sting occurred, it is nothing to be concerned about.	**True or False**
E. coli and the hepatitis A virus can cause a food borne illness.	**True or False**
Some medications can increase sensitivity to the sun.	**True or False**
Petroleum jelly or butter can have a cooling effect on a burn.	**True or False**
Pennsylvania is one of the hardest hit states for Lyme disease.	**True or False**
When it comes to insect repellent more is better.	**True or False**

Answers to Summer Safety Quiz



1. **False.** Deer ticks carry Lyme disease. It can take 24 to 48 hours for the tick to pass on the bacteria. To be safe, though, you'll want to remove the tick as soon as possible. Some tips that may help to prevent a tick bite are wearing light colored clothing when you are outside in a wooded area or a high grassy area, so that you can easily spot the tick and wearing closed shoes or boots, long sleeved shirts, and long pants. Look for a bull's eye rash on your skin and if you see one get treated as soon as possible. If you work with an individual who cannot independently check for ticks, assist them as needed after coming in from the outdoors.

2. **False.** Drinking 8 glasses of water daily is a great way for all of us to stay hydrated. This is very important in the warmer weather since we lose more fluid from our body through perspiration and we need the fluid to replace that. Caffeinated drinks, on the other hand, can have a dehydrating effect on our body by pulling extra fluid out of the body.

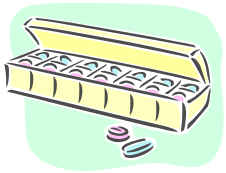
3. **True.** We also need to wear protective clothing as needed and to use a water resistant sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) of 15 or higher. Sunglasses and hats can also be helpful in protecting the eyes and head from the sun.

4. **True.** Everyone is at risk for skin cancer, but especially people with light skin color, light hair or eye color, a family history of skin cancer, chronic sun exposure, a history of sunburns early in life or freckles, according to the American Cancer Society.

5. **False.** Whenever there is swelling in the face or an area other than where the sting occurred, it is a concern and needs immediate follow-up. Other symptoms of an allergic reaction are hives, itching, rash, difficulty breathing and shock. An allergic reaction can be very serious and even, in some extreme cases, lead to death. An allergic reaction can occur even if a person has been stung before with no complications.

6. **True.** These organisms can cause a food borne illness, along with salmonella and cyclospora. The typical symptoms of a food borne illness are nausea, vomiting, cramps and diarrhea. In serious cases, high fever, bloody stool and prolonged vomiting may occur. Young children, pregnant women, older people and those with compromised immune systems are hit hardest. It is very important to use good food handling practices. When you are packing food for a picnic, place cold food in a cooler with plenty of ice or commercial freezing gels. Cold food should be held at or below 40º F and the cooler should be stored in the shade. Hot food should be wrapped well, placed in an insulated container and kept at or above 140 º F.

7. **True.** There are many medications that can increase a person's sensitivity to the sun in varying degrees. The list of medications is too long to include here, but some examples are: tetracycline, antibiotics, sulfonamides such as Bactrim, non-steroidal anti- inflammatory drugs such as ibuprofen and some fluoroquinolones. The best source of information regarding medication and sun sensitivity is your health care provider who is familiar with your medications and with your health status. Feel free to discuss this with him/her.



8. **False.** For a minor burn, run cool water over it and cover it with a clean, dry cloth. Don't apply petroleum jelly or butter, which can hold heat in the tissue. Remember that burns larger than the size of the palm of your hand, and burns on the hands, feet, face, genitals, and major joints usually require emergency treatment. Safety is very important in preventing burns caused by fireworks and grills. It is important for there to be adequate supervision for consumers during outside activities, including grilling, swimming and games.

9. **True.** Nearly all cases of Lyme disease in the US happen in the Northeast, upper Midwest and Pacific coastal states.

10. **False.** Use insect repellents as recommended on the product's label and don't over apply. Using more product than you need won't increase your protection. Since mosquitoes carry the West Nile Virus, anything that you do to decrease the number of mosquitoes in and around your home will be helpful. You can do this by draining sources of standing water, thereby reducing the number of places mosquitoes can lay their eggs and breed. At least once or twice a week, empty water from flowerpots, pet food and water dishes, birdbaths, swimming pool covers, buckets, barrels and cans.

PAIN

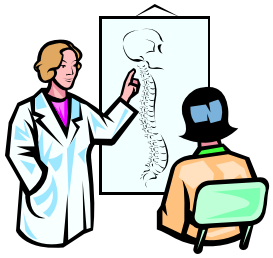
Ask five different people for a definition of pain and you are likely to receive five different answers. Pain may be sharp or dull, intermittent or constant, throbbing or steady. Pain is an unpleasant sensation signaling actual or possible injury. In its most benign form, pain warns us that something isn't quite right. Pain is the most common reason people visit their doctor.

How You Feel Pain

Pain results from a series of exchanges among three major components of your nervous system:

Peripheral Nerves

These nerves extend from your spinal cord to your skin, muscles and internal organs. Some peripheral nerve fibers end with receptors that respond to touch, pressure, vibration, cold and warmth. Other types of nerve fibers end with nociceptors that detect actual or potential tissue damage.



Spinal Cord

The nerve fibers that transmit pain messages enter the spinal cord in an area called the dorsal horn. There, they release chemicals (neurotransmitters) that activate other nerve cells in the spinal cord, which process the information and send it up to the brain.

Brain

The information arrives at the thalamus - a sorting and switching station deep inside your brain. The thalamus forwards the message simultaneously to three specialized regions of the brain: the physical sensation region (somatosensory cortex), the emotional feeling region (limbic system) and the thinking region (frontal cortex). Your brain responds to pain by sending messages that moderate the pain in the spinal cord. The location of your pain can affect how you perceive it. A headache that interferes with work or concentration may be more bothersome and therefore receive a stronger response than arthritic pain in your knee.

Types of Pain

Acute pain can be a difficult medical problem to diagnose and treat. Acute pain may be caused by many events or circumstances. Symptoms can last hours, days, or weeks and are commonly associated with tissue injury, inflammation, a surgical procedure, childbirth or a brief disease process. Acute pain begins suddenly and doesn't last long.

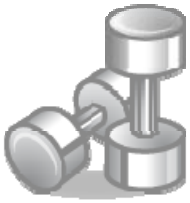
Chronic pain lasts for weeks or months. Pain is considered chronic if it does one of the following: lasts for more than one month longer than expected, based on the illness or injury; recurs off and on for months or years; or is associated with a chronic disorder (such as cancer, arthritis, diabetes, or fibromyalgia) or an injury that does not heal.

More than 75 million Americans suffer from persistent debilitating pain. Pain not only affects individuals, their families and friends, but also drains resources from employers, insurance agencies, health care institutions and the United States economy. Persistent pain sufferers are among the most underserved patients in the United States. People in pain try to live normal lives, hiding their suffering. There is no way to understand the severity of another person's pain.

Treatment of Pain

Treatment of chronic pain usually involves medicine and therapy. Medicines used for chronic pain include pain relievers, antidepressants and anticonvulsants. Different types of medicines help people with different types of pain. Long acting medicines are used for constant pain and short acting medicines treat pain that comes and goes. Several types of therapy can ease pain. Occupational therapists can identify activities or behaviors that aggravate pain and suggest alternatives. They can teach methods for decreasing the frequency and duration of painful episodes, implement therapy interventions that may decrease dependence on or use of pain medications, facilitate the development of better function for daily activities at work and home, collaborate with the client's team of health care professionals to determine the best course of treatment and intervention and recommend and teach the client how to use adaptive equipment to decrease pain while carrying out activities of daily living.

Physical Therapy such as stretching and strengthening activities and low-impact exercises such as walking, swimming or biking can help reduce the pain. The benefits of movement through exercise can:



Prompt your body to release endorphins. These chemicals block pain signals from reaching your brain and help to alleviate anxiety and depression - conditions that can make chronic pain more difficult to control.

Help you build strength. The stronger your muscles, the more force and load you'll take off your bones and cartilage, lessening pain.

Increase your flexibility. Joints that can move through their full range of motion are less likely to cause aches and pains.

Improve your sleep quality. Regular exercise can lower your stress hormones, resulting in better sleep.

Boost your energy level. In the long run, regular exercise can actually give you more energy to cope with chronic pain.

Help you maintain a healthy weight. Exercise burns calories, which can help you drop excess pounds. This will reduce stress on your joints, another way to improve chronic pain.

Enhance your mood. Exercise contributes to an over-all sense of well-being. It increases blood and oxygen flow to all your tissues.

Protect your heart and blood vessels. Exercise decreases the risk of high blood pressure, diabetes, heart attack and stroke.

Behavioral Therapy can reduce your pain through methods that help you relax, such as meditation and yoga. It can also help to decrease stress.

Hydration

Water is the most abundant substance in the body, yet is often one of the most overlooked. Experts rank water second only to oxygen as essential for life. People can survive for over a month without food, but only for about a week without water. Water represents approximately 60% of our total body weight - for a 150 pound person that is 98 pounds of water!

Water plays a number of vital roles in the body. It transports glucose, oxygen, and fat to working muscles and waste products (carbon dioxide and lactic acid) away from muscles. Our body must maintain a temperature within a few degrees of 98.6º to prevent cell death. Working muscles generate a great deal of heat. The body regulates its temperature by sweating, allowing the excess heat to dissipate. Sweat evaporates from the skin, which cools it down. This cools the rest of the body. Water transports and eliminates waste products in the urine. Water is essential for the production of saliva and gastric juices needed for the proper digestion of food. Water is also critical for proper bowel function and elimination of solid waste from the body and it is important for the lubrication of joints, organs and tissues.

Our blood is 92% water. When we become dehydrated, our blood volume decreases and the thirst center in the brain is stimulated. However, this is a slow response, occurring too late to be the reliable indicator for when we need to rehydrate. If we wait until we are thirsty, we are already dehydrated to the point where concentration and performance are being negatively affected. In fact, if we rely on thirst alone as an indicator for how much to drink, we will only be meeting 50% of our fluid intake needs.

Many people are chronically fluid depleted and may not recognize many of the symptoms of dehydration. Headaches, dizziness, nausea, muscle weakness, lethargy or lack of energy, irritability, irrational behavior, inability to concentrate, muscle cramps, dry eyes and confusion are all major symptoms and may be experienced with mild (only 1%) dehydration.

Most of the fluid needs the body has should be met by drinking water. Beverages containing caffeine or alcohol are not helpful with hydration as they cause an additional fluid loss through diuretic effects and actually increase the amount of fluid needed to stay properly hydrated. A general rule of thumb for how much water to drink is to take the number of pounds a person weighs, divide that by 2, and to drink that many ounces of water throughout the day. Another good measure is to drink enough water regularly so that urine color is very pale yellow to clear (unless vitamins or other medications are taken that change the color of the urine).

It is important to note that while hotter weather and physical activity increase our need for hydration, having a sedentary lifestyle does not excuse anyone from having hydration needs. We all lose a significant amount of water just by sitting, through breathing, urine production and normal sweating. So, drink up! Fill up your cup or water bottle and sip your way through your day.

Outdoor Physical Activity

For many individuals, finding time for outdoor activities and exercise can be challenging. Spending eight hours a day at work, making dinner for the family, doing homework with children and other household chores many times leaves little time for exercise. However, the opportunities are *out there!*

Spring and summer bring lots of great things: fresh air, reconnection with neighbors, warm temperatures and longer daylight hours. Having to go outside each day poses a variety of possibilities for activities and exercise:

- Get up early in the morning and go for a 30-minute walk.
- Throughout the day, take a couple of 10-minute walks.
- If you have access to a pool, swim laps or do water aerobics for a few minutes.
- Brush the dust off your bike and ride around your neighborhood or nearby park.
- Park a few blocks from work or the store and walk the rest of the way.

If you are an indoor exerciser, moving your workout routine outdoors can be very satisfying. As opposed to a stationary bike or treadmill, bicycling or running outdoors provides different mental stimulation and physical demands. Changes in scenery and traveling from one location to another seem to make the exercise time go faster.

Use a park bench or playground equipment to do “step ups” or “triceps dips” to work the muscles of the lower and upper body.

Remember, outdoor activities can also pose some risks, including injuries, sunburn and heat related exhaustion. Always wear appropriate protective equipment, such as a helmet when bicycling, proper shoes for running and walking and reflective apparel when outdoors at night. Wear sunscreen, sunglasses and lightweight sun protective clothing.

Avoid dehydration by drinking plenty of fluids and taking water with you.

Recognize symptoms of heat exhaustion: thirst, fatigue, disorientation, headache and dizziness.

If you are not accustomed to physical activity, talk to your primary care physician before beginning an exercise program.

Exercising outdoors has many benefits:

- No crowded gyms
- No driving time to the gym
- Little or no equipment is needed
- The ability to workout anywhere, anytime – even on vacation
- Natural vitamin D absorption from the sun and best of all – Fresh air!

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Ideas for Our Newsletter?

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