

# NEUROTALK

CLIENT INFORMATION SERIES

## Word-Finding Difficulties

Practical strategies to help when the word you want doesn't come — for you, and for the people who talk with you.

### WHAT'S HAPPENING

Word-finding difficulty (sometimes called anomia) is when you know exactly what you want to say, but the specific word won't come out — even though it's "on the tip of your tongue." It's common after a stroke or brain injury, and can also occur with some neurological conditions.

Many people notice it more when they're tired, stressed, or talking about something less familiar. It doesn't mean you've forgotten what something is — just that finding the label for it is harder right now.

### STRATEGIES TO TRY

#### 1 Describe around it

Describe what the thing looks like, what it's used for, where you might find it or what it does. For example, if you can't find "kettle", you might say, "It's what I use to boil water."

#### 2 Name the category

Ask yourself, "What type of thing is it?" or "What group does it belong to?" Thinking about its category, purpose or related words may help you retrieve the word.

#### 3 Try the first sound

If it helps, think of the first sound in the word or say it aloud. The first letter, a starting sound or a cue from someone else may help you find the word. This doesn't work for everyone or every word.

#### 4 Gesture or draw

Use your hands, point to an object or picture, or draw a quick sketch. You don't always need the exact word to get your message across.

#### 5 Slow down, don't rush

Take a breath and allow yourself time to find the word. If it doesn't come, try another strategy or move on and return to it later.

#### 6 Say it another way

Try a different word, describe what you mean or rephrase the sentence. Your message can still be understood without the exact word.

#### 7 Come back later

If the word still won't come, that's okay. Try describing it another way, use a different word, or move on and return to it later. You don't have to keep trying until you find the exact word.

#### 8 Writing / typing

If speaking the word is difficult, try writing or typing it, or writing down a few letters. You could also use your phone, pictures or a communication app to help get your message across.

### FOR FAMILY & FRIENDS

- **Give extra time.** Allow the person to find their words without rushing or finishing their sentences.
- **Ask before helping.** Try, "Would you like a hint?" or "Would it help if I gave you some choices?"
- **Offer helpful cues.** A first sound, a description or a small number of choices may help, if the person wants support.
- **Use other ways to communicate.** Gestures, writing, pictures, pointing or drawing can help convey the message.

- **Reduce distractions.** A quieter environment may make it easier to concentrate on finding words.
- **Focus on the message.** Respond to what the person is trying to communicate, rather than correcting every word.
- **Acknowledge the difficulty.** Be patient and supportive without drawing unnecessary attention to the word-finding problem.
- **Ask before helping.** Try asking, “Would you like me to help you find the word, or would you prefer a little more time?” Different people prefer different types of support, and their preferences may change from one situation to another.

*Word-finding difficulties don't take away your thoughts, opinions or the things you want to share. There is more than one way to get your message across.*

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