

# Primary Progressive Aphasia (PPA) - THE BASICS

## What is Primary Progressive Aphasia (PPA)?

- Primary Progressive Aphasia, also known as PPA, is a degenerative neurological condition in which language capabilities become impaired over time.

## How is it different from other forms of Aphasia?

- It is different from other forms of Aphasia that result from a left hemisphere stroke or brain injury, as there must be no focal lesion for a diagnosis of PPA to occur. PPA results in deterioration of brain tissue important for speech and language.

## Does PPA only occur in the elderly population?

- It often affects individuals < 65 years of age.

## What are the symptoms associated with PPA?

- The initial symptoms are often difficulties with speech and language; however additional cognitive problems usually arise later, such as memory loss.
- There are different types of PPA, and the patterns of language deficits often differ from patient to patient.

## Is PPA the same as Dementia or Alzheimer's?

- PPA is NOT the same as Alzheimer's Disease
- It is a subtype of Frontotemporal Dementia (FTD)

## What are the different types of PPA?

- There are 3 variants of PPA
  - **Nonfluent variant/agrammatic**
    - This variant primarily affects **SPEECH**.
    - **Syntax or grammar** becomes impaired, especially when it comes to using small connecting words to help our sentences flow and be grammatical.
    - Speech is often **hesitant and effortful**, and sentence length is reduced over time
    - Writing may be affected in the same manner.
    - They often have **preserved language comprehension** for specific items or objects.
  - **Semantic variant**
    - This variant primarily impacts one's ability to retrieve words - **ANOMIA** - and the meanings and associations of words are lost.
    - Both **comprehension** of the word and the **ability to retrieve words** may be lost.
    - **Paraphasias** (word substitution errors, such as chair/table, apple/pear) are common.
    - Speech remains **fluent** and language remains **grammatical**.



- **Logopenic variant**
  - This variant primarily affects **Phonological Processing**.
  - Grammar and comprehension are less affected, but *speech is slow*.
  - A key feature is *impaired repetition* of multisyllabic words, and especially phrases.
  - **Phonemic paraphasias** (or sound substitutions) are also common.

### **Given that it's a degenerative disease, is there any value in receiving speech/language treatment?**

- Most people with PPA maintain ability to take care of themselves, pursue hobbies, and, in some instances, remain employed.
- It can be helpful to work with a Speech Language Pathologist (SLP), especially early on in the process.
- The SLP can select therapy tasks targeting the affected language modalities and processes, aiming to maintain current levels of functioning for as long as possible.
- SLPs can also be helpful in identifying strategies and techniques to help make communication easier as PPA progresses, working with the patient and his/her family.
- It can also be helpful to look into Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) Devices early on in the process, as it's easier for someone to learn how to use and navigate the device before the comprehension is more impacted by the disease.
- Voice banking is also an option for people with PPA who begin to use AAC devices while they still are able to communicate verbally.
- There are also opportunities to participate in clinical trials and research studies focused on PPA:
  - [Research in Speech Language and Hearing Sciences | Speech, Language, and Hearing Sciences | Moody College of Communication | The University of Texas at Austin \(utexas.edu\)](#)
  - [Research into PPA: Mesulam Center for Cognitive Neurology and Alzheimer's Disease: Feinberg School of Medicine: Northwestern University](#)
  - [Research | Laboratory for Cognition and Neural Stimulation | Perelman School of Medicine at the University of Pennsylvania \(upenn.edu\)](#)

The above information was gathered from the following sources:

*Classification of primary progressive aphasia and its variants* (Gorno-Tempini et al., 2011)

National Aphasia Association ([Home - National Aphasia Association](#))

Association of FTD ([AFTD - The Association for Frontotemporal Degeneration \(theaftd.org\)](#))

Lingraphica ([Overview of Speech Generating Devices \(SGDs\) | Lingraphica \(aphasia.com\)](#))

