



Speech and communication



Although everybody is affected differently, the majority of people with PSP will develop speech problems at some point as the disease progresses. This happens because the areas of the brain controlling the movement of the tongue, lips and throat are affected.

If you are experiencing any cognitive issues then this can also impact on your ability to communicate.

Speech can be affected in various ways:

- Your voice may become strained and harsh
- It may become quiet and fast, making it difficult for others to hear and understand you
- You may experience slurring of your words, particularly longer words, similar to the effects of excess alcohol.

If you are finding that your speech is affected, your GP can refer you to a speech and language therapist (SLT), ideally one who has previous experience of PSP.

How cognitive changes can affect communication

If you have cognitive changes as a result of PSP this can also affect how you communicate. During conversation you may find that it takes you longer to process information, and therefore that your responses are slower. This can make others think that you are less interested in what they are saying, or they may assume that you do not want to take part. Letting people know about these challenges will ensure that they do not forget to include you in conversations, or to ask for your opinion.



You may also find it difficult to sequence your thoughts and this can make it harder for you to explain a sequence of events in the right order during conversation.

Furthermore, you may also find it difficult to sequence actions in your head, making it harder to carry out everyday tasks. It is important for people supporting you to understand this so that they are able to help by guiding you one step at a time if necessary.

You may find that doing two things at once, such as walking and talking, becomes less easy to do. Again, explaining this to people around you will help them to understand and support you more effectively.

If you are struggling with feelings of apathy, you may feel withdrawn from everyday life at times. This may be difficult for people around you to interpret, and it could be assumed that you are just taking longer to respond. If you feel able, explaining your feelings at such times may help to relieve pressure on you, as well as those around you.

See section on *Cognition and mood*.

Other factors affecting communication

Because PSP affects the muscles, you may find that your facial expressions are reduced, or that problems with your vision make it harder for you to maintain eye contact with others. Explaining the situation will help them to understand that whilst you cannot look at them or may not be showing much change in facial expression, you are still interested in what they are saying.

How can the speech and language therapist help?

The SLT can advise you on alternative techniques of getting your message across. They can also provide tailored guidance for carers, friends or relatives on how best to support you with any communication challenges. Try to have regular reviews with your SLT as your needs are likely to change.

Speech and language therapy may include exercises that target reduced speech volume, or increased speech rate. Or it may include simple techniques such as taking regular pauses to help make your speech easier to understand.

There is a huge range of techniques and devices to help support communication. Your SLT will assess you to find the best methods to support you based on your needs, abilities and preferences, but some examples of this include simple tools such as:

- Pen and paper
- Alphabet boards
- Communication charts.

Or more high tech solutions such as:

- Voice amplifiers
- Voice output communication aids.

The SLT may also advise you and your family, friends and carers on how to create your own systems of communication, such as the 'squeeze my hand' method suggested below.

Top Tip

- If speech becomes difficult, another method might be useful. It works on a 'squeeze my hand' basis
- The carer simply goes through the letters of the alphabet and the person with PSP squeezes their hand at the right letter
- There is a more sophisticated version – a double squeeze which takes you into code. This way each letter of the alphabet has a meaning, such as 'I'm hungry', 'I'm tired', 'be quiet' or other simple phrases.