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Speech Strategies for People with ALS

1. REPETITION

The most basic strategy is to repeat a word when it's not understood.

If you've repeated a word two times and your communication partner still doesn't get it, try spelling it out. Just repeating the word over and over doesn't add any new information. Often, just spelling the first 1-2 letters of the word is enough.

2. SPELLING

There are different ways you can spell out a word when your speech isn't understood:

- a. Spelling it out verbally ("A-N-N-I-V....").
- b. Pointing to letters on a paper communication board.
- c. "Writing" the letter in the air, on a table top, on your palm, or on the top of your thigh.

SIGNALING "SPELL MODE"

If your speech is very hard to understand, it can help to have a signal which means "I'm spelling now". This way your communication partner knows that you are in "spell mode" and doesn't think you are still talking.

3. FOR THE COMMUNICATION PARTNER:

REPEATING BACK THE PARTS WHICH ARE UNDERSTOOD

When your communication partner doesn't understand part of what you said, it can help to have them repeat back the parts that they **DID** understand. Your partner can replace the word 'blank' for the part that they didn't understand.

For example:

SPEAKER (w/ALS):

"We are going to the store near the *(garbled)* and the park."

COMMUNICATION PARTNER:

"OK, I got "We are going to the store near the... *'blank'*... and the park"

SPEAKER (w/ALS):

"... waterfront ..."

This saves you from having to repeat the entire sentence, saving time, energy and frustration.



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4. REDUCE NOISE IN THE ENVIRONMENT

When you are talking, it can help to mute the TV, turn down music and eliminate any other distractions. If you are having an extended conversation in a noisy environment, if possible, move to a quieter location.

5. FACE TO FACE COMMUNICATION

It can help if people look directly at your face while you are speaking. Lip reading and facial gestures go a long way in making it easier for them to understand you. It also helps if your listener is able to give you their full attention, and not multi-task while you speak, if possible.

6. SLOW DOWN AND EXAGGERATE SPEECH

Slowing down and over-articulating (exaggerating) speech sounds can make it much easier to be understood.

7. FOR PEOPLE WHO ARE VERY HARD TO UNDERSTAND:

PUT A SPACE BETWEEN WORDS AND RE-VOICING

If your speech is very difficult to understand, it can be very helpful to pause in between each word, so that your words don't run together.

It may also help to have your communication partner re-voice (repeat back) what you are saying, either word for word, or every couple of words.

POINTING TO THE FIRST LETTER OF THE WORD

If your speech is very hard to understand, it may help to point to the first letter of the word on a paper communication board as you say the word. This serves two purposes:

It helps you to slow down and put some space in between each word. It also gives your communication partner some additional information about the word (the first letter).

8. PLANNING AROUND FATIGUE LEVELS

Your speech may be stronger at certain times of the day (for example, in the morning.) Plan important phone calls, meetings or social gatherings for times when your speech is stronger and you are less fatigued.

9. MEALS/SOCIAL GATHERINGS

If it's difficult for you to speak and eat at the same time, consider eating/filling up before going to a social event. That way, you can focus on talking and socializing. You can still enjoy the food at the event, but you won't be as pressured to eat a whole meal.



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10. SIGNAL FOR “I HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY”

When your speech is slow, it may be difficult to take part in a fast moving conversation. Create a signal which means “I have something to say”. Let your frequent communication partners know what that signal means. (For some people, it might mean “When I use this signal, I need you to be quiet for a minute so I can say something”).

Note: We will discuss training communication partners and communication preferences in an upcoming post.

11. AMPLIFICATION

If your speech is relatively clear, but your volume is soft, an amplifier can make your speech louder. A speech amplifier can save you energy, since you don’t have to work at projecting your voice.

An amplifier can also be useful:

- a. When making a call on speaker phone
- b. While driving in a car (where there is a lot background noise).
- c. When making a speech to a group of people.

Again, a voice amplifier won't make your speech clearer, but it will definitely make it louder.

The Spokeman is a high quality small voice amplifier available through Luminaud. (If you purchase a voice amplifier, purchase a good quality headset. Don’t use a transdermal (throat) microphone, which will pick up the sound of swallowing.