

Motor neurone disease

Motor neurone disease (MND) affects communication, thinking and swallowing.

MND is a group of rare diseases that affect the nerves in the brain and spinal cord called motor neurones. These nerves control the muscles you use for talking, walking, swallowing and breathing.

MND progresses over time. It affects everyone differently.

Changes to speech

MND can affect the muscles used for speaking.

This can make your speech slow, slurred and hard to understand. Speech might sound nasal, if air escapes from your nose when you talk.

It can also cause your voice to sound soft, breathy or strained

MND can make it difficult to communicate, especially in groups or when it's noisy. It can also affect your facial expressions and gestures.

Changes to thinking and behaviour

Some people living with MND experience changes to their thinking skills and behaviour. These changes can be quite subtle.

They may affect:

- your motivation to plan or do things
- your emotions, which can become exaggerated or reduced
- your planning and problem solving.

Problems with swallowing

You may also have problems with eating and drinking. It might be hard to chew. Food might get stuck in your throat, or you might cough when you eat and drink.

If this happens to you, you should talk to your healthcare team about it.

A speech pathologist can do a swallow assessment.

Social isolation

People living with MND can become socially isolated.

However, if you get help to use different ways of communicating, you can still be social and do the things you enjoy.

Your friends and family can support you.

Communication strategies

There are things you can do to improve your communication and lead a full life.

- For example, you can:
- speak more slowly, and use phrases instead of long sentences
- emphasise important words and pause between phrases
- reduce background noise, for example turn off the TV or radio.

Your friends and family can help you by:

- facing you when they talk to you
- creating a quiet environment
- understanding that talking can make you tired
- give you extra time and ask one question at a time.

Communication aids

You can use things like pen and paper, word books or picture boards to communicate. You can also use devices like voice output devices and digital tablets.

These things are called augmentative or alternative communication (AAC).

Voice banking

Voice banking is when you record your voice so you can use your own voice in electronic communication aids. It's best to do voice banking before speech or voice changes occur.

Working with a speech pathologist

A speech pathologist can help you find the best strategies for you. They will work with you and your family and friends to find the best ways of communicating.

They will also work with other health professionals like occupational therapists to find the best ways to support you.

More detailed information about MND, communication and cognition, and support can be found at the Motor Neurone Disease Association websites in Australia

(<https://www.mndaustralia.org.au/>) and UK (<https://www.mndassociation.org/>)

Specific information on speech and communication support can be found here:

<https://www.mndaustralia.org.au/mnd-connect/living-with-mnd/speech-communication>