

## WHAT IS AAC?



Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) refers to any kind of system or device used either to supplement existing speech or to serve as an alternative when there is no speech.

Often, people think that AAC means a “computerized talking device” – like you may have seen the physicist Dr. Stephen Hawking using. Although this is a form of AAC, the term actually refers to anything that can be used to make communication easier for a person who has speech difficulties. AAC can consist of:

- Sign language, gestures and/or vocalizations
- no-tech, low-tech or high-tech strategies or a combination of all three.

AAC can be developed and customized to fit an individual’s needs and preferences and can be adapted to your changing communication needs.

### References:

The ALS Association  
[www.alsa.org](http://www.alsa.org)

AAC Institute  
[www.aac institute.org](http://www.aac institute.org)

American Speech-Language-Hearing Association  
<http://www.asha.org/public/speech/disorders/ALSchallenge.com>

Purposes of AAC Device Use for Persons with ALS as Reported by Caregivers  
M. Fried-Oken, et al (2006)

### Resources:

Communication Basics for People with ALS  
<http://amyandpals.com>

The Steve Gleason Foundation  
<http://www.teamgleason.org/>

Voice Banking Information:  
[http://webor.alsa.org/site/PageNavigator/OR\\_8a\\_AAC\\_resources.html](http://webor.alsa.org/site/PageNavigator/OR_8a_AAC_resources.html)

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# ALS and Communication

The how’s, why’s and when’s of AAC



**AAC - AUGMENTATIVE AND ALTERNATIVE COMMUNICATION**

**PLANNING FOR YOUR FUTURE NOW**

## WHAT CHANGES TO MY SPEECH AND VOICE CAN I EXPECT?

ALS is a progressive disease and the symptoms are varied from person to person. Your neurologist can explain the symptoms on your personal medical findings.

Most people with ALS will begin to experience difficulty with their speech and many will lose all speaking capabilities. The point at which speaking becomes difficult depends on the type of ALS you have.

The initial symptoms of speech difficulty or loss due to ALS may initially include:

- weakness or stiffness in your lips and tongue
- twitching of the lips and tongue
- changes in your voice and speech, such as hoarseness, a breathy sounding quality, slurred speech or slower speech
- difficulty in eating and swallowing



**Even though you may lose your ability to speak, you don't need to lose your ability to communicate!**

## HOW DO I FIND OUT ABOUT AAC OPTIONS?

A speech-language pathologist (SLP) is a medical professional trained to help with speech and swallowing difficulties and can assist you with these aspects of ALS symptoms.

Speech-language pathology has many sub-specialties. **See the resource section of this brochure**, or ask your neurologist, local ALS support chapter, or the American Speech-Language Hearing Association (ASHA) to assist you in finding an SLP that will be dedicated to meeting your specific needs.

## WHY DO I NEED A PROFESSIONAL?

There are many types and options of AAC devices available. An SLP is an un-biased professional who can help you evaluate your current needs and anticipate what your future needs may be.

Many insurance companies cover the cost of AAC devices, but they most often require documentation from an SLP to provide that funding.

Insurance will usually only pay for one device throughout the course of your disease. You want to be sure you get the right one!

## WHEN SHOULD I START THINKING ABOUT AAC?

The sooner the better!

If it has been determined that your ALS symptoms will include speech difficulties, an SLP can:

- Make recommendations for strategies to compensate for your speech difficulties
- Evaluate and track your speech symptoms
- Develop strategies for "voice banking."
- Help you choose the AAC device that best fits your needs and help you customize it
- Train you to use your AAC device

Early introduction of AAC and practice with it will help reduce frustration levels between you and your communication partners when the time comes that you require communication assistance.



"Typing with your fingers or thumbs is sooooo 2012. I tweeted that earlier in the year. I type with my eyes. Not only that, I navigate my computer, create and play music, keep a calendar, conference call, lead web X meetings, text and, obviously, tweet with my eyes."

**Steve Gleason**, former NFL player, person with ALS, and AAC user. <http://www.teamglean.org>