

ALS Communication Options

Whether you experience speech and swallowing difficulties early on or later in the disease process, it is helpful to learn about alternative forms of communication before you need them. The following strategies and devices can help you communicate and stay engaged with others.

Voice Banking

Voice banking allows you to record your own voice ahead of time when you can still speak clearly. When a speech generating device is needed, it will give your device a more personalized voice that more closely mimics your natural voice. Voice banking software options include Acapela and ModelTalker.

Voice banking is not covered by insurance. However, the nonprofit organization Team Gleason will pay for Acapela or ModelTalker for anyone in the United States who has been diagnosed with ALS.

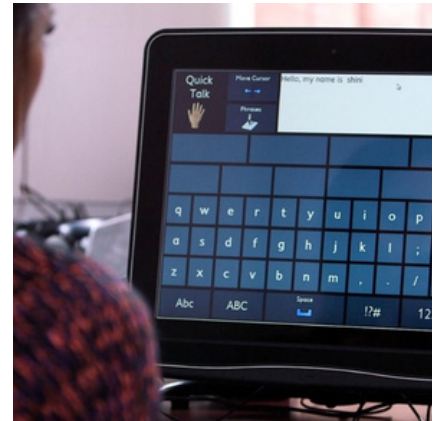
BCH Message Banking™

Message Banking™ is similar to voice banking in that you record your voice before you lose it so your future communications will be more personal. But with Message Banking™, you choose and record specific, common phrases that will play in your own voice instead of in a synthetic version of your voice. You can only use it for the specific words and phrases that you record ahead of time like common and meaningful words and phrases such as “I love you,” “Thank you,” and people’s names.

myMessageBanking is software that guides you through the process, helps organize your messages, stores the messages, and provides a way to download the messages onto various speech-generating devices and communication apps. This service is free for personal use.

Double Dipping

With the Acapela software described above, you can “double dip,” which means recording your voice once for both voice banking and message banking. To do so, you will need to message bank a certain number of personal messages. These recordings will then be used as your voice banking recordings.



Low-Tech Solutions

There are some simple, inexpensive devices that can help you continue to communicate before you need a larger speech-generating device. These include LCD writing tablets, alphabet boards (charts with words, letters, symbols, and pictures), voice amplifiers, and dry-erase boards. These low-cost devices are not covered by insurance. Before paying out of pocket, ask your local ALS Network care manager if they have loaner devices.

Bridging Voice (www.bridgingvoice.org) is a nonprofit organization that can help assess, educate, and guide you on the communication options that would work best for you.

Speech-Generating Devices (SGDs)

When you can no longer speak, speech-generating devices can speak for you. On a digital screen, you select letters, words, and messages and the device will speak the messages you create using the method that works best for you. Speech may be generated by using your hands to touch the screen, type on a keyboard, or move a joystick; moving your head to operate a head mouse or optical head pointer; or using your eyes by looking at and selecting specific letters, words, and messages. SGDs are also computers that allow you to email, text, and browse the Internet.

To get an SGD, you will need to schedule an evaluation through your speech therapist, neurologist, or primary care doctor. The speech therapist will conduct your evaluation, go over your options, and submit the request to the manufacturer, who will then submit the authorization to Medicare, Medicaid, or private insurance. Medicare will only cover one speech-generating device every five years, so you will want to make sure you get the right one for you.

If you do not have insurance or are concerned about cost, ask your local ALS organization or Team Gleason if they have a speech-generating device that you can borrow at no cost. You would still need an evaluation and prescription in order to borrow one.

Get Local Support



Formerly ALS Golden West

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