Problems with finding the words you want (Word-finding difficulties)

What is it?

Problems with word finding is when you <u>know the word</u> but can't think of it when you want to use it. It may feel like a **'tip of the tongue'** moment.

Everyone experiences word finding difficulties from time to time; but for some it can get in the way of every day talking.

What causes it?

It can occur after an injury to the language areas of the brain such as:

- Stroke
- Traumatic head injury
- Brain tumours
- Dementia
- Other brain conditions and cognitive impairments

What does it look like?

Here are some things you and those around you might notice with your talking:

Using a lot of **"filler" type words:** e.g. 'er', 'erm', 'um' or 'uh', 'like', 'y'know'

Feeling fed up and frustrated

Longer words coming out **scrambled:** e.g. saying "abulams" for "ambulance"

Mixing up words with **similar meanings:** e.g. saying table for chair

Using a lot of **general words** in place of the one you really need: e.g. 'thingy', 'going' 'whatsit' - "he's going to the… thingy at the what you call it"

Mixing up words that **sound like each other** e.g. saying pear for peach

Can't remember a word at all

Strategies to help:

1

Delay:

Give it a second or two – with a bit of extra time, the word usually pops out on your own.
e.g. "Do you have any…. Oh one sec… any scissors?"

2

Describe:

Give the listener information about what the thing looks like – any extra information helps.
e.g. "Do you have any…. oh…of those things that cut paper? Scissors!"

3

Association:

See if you can think of something related. Even if it's not quite right it may prompt the word or convey meaning.
e.g. "Do you have any… oh… they're not knives but similar?"

4

Similar meaning:

Think of a word that means the same or something similar. e.g. "Do you have any…. clippers?"

5

First letter:

Try to write or think of the first letter of the work. Scan the alphabet to see if any letter triggers anything for you.
e.g. "Do you have any…. (traces an S in the air)... scissors?"

6

Gesture or action:

Use your hands or body to act out the word to help the listener.
e.g. "Do you have any…. (makes cutting gesture with fingers)?"

7

Draw:

Sketch out a quick picture of what you're trying to say. You don't have to be good at drawing!
e.g. "Do you have any…. (draws scissors on a notepad)?"

8

Narrow it down:

Give the general topic or category. Is it a person, place or thing? A family member/friend? Stating the topic can help the listener make predictions.
e.g. "do you have any… oh… they're office supplies."

9

Look it up:

Is there somewhere the word is written down? A notebook, a diary, the contacts in your phone?

10

Come back later:

If you can't think of the word and your partner can't guess, it's okay to stop. It's possible your brain will pop the word out later when you're thinking about something else. This is a last resort so try other strategies first.

Using cues to help word-finding:

Cues are simply giving someone (or yourself) a **hint** or **clue** as to what the missing word might be.

We know you know the word you are looking for, so sometimes providing cues helps you retrieve the word quicker.

Sound cues:

These cues use **sounds** to aid in a patient's word retrieval.

For example, if the missing word is soup you could cue that word by making an "**S**" sound. You could say, "Oh, you're thinking of a word that starts with **Sssssss ...**"

Hearing the starting "**S**" sound can sometimes trigger the memory of the full word.

Information cues:

These cues are **category** or **background** clues.

For example, if the missing word is horse, you could cue that word by saying, **"It's a farm animal."**

A background cue would state a function of the word. For example, if the missing word is hammer, you could say, **"It is used to hit nails."**

Sentence completion cues

For example, if the target word is **door,** you could say, **"I unlocked the front _____."**

You wouldn't unlock the front tree, so the strategy here is to use the related information (unlock and front) to help determine what the target word is (door).