

Melodic Intonation Therapy for Aphasia

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What is aphasia?

- **Aphasia** = Acquired impairment of language
- **Speaking, understanding, writing, and reading** may be impaired.
- **Acquired** means that the impairment is not from birth.
- The etiology (medical cause) may be **stroke (most common)**, traumatic brain injury, brain infection (such as herpes encephalitis—this is rare), or progressive neurological disease.
- Famous people with aphasia: **Bruce Willis**, Congresswoman **Gabrielle Giffords**, **Sharon Stone**, **Kirk Douglas** (see the book *My Stroke of Luck*)

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Working as a
speech
therapist in
hospitals

I learned that when someone has a new onset of aphasia, they often **can sing "Happy Birthday"** in unison with me even if they can't talk.

Speech language pathologists have known that people with aphasia can often sing better than they can speak since at least the mid-20th Century.

Melodic Intonation Therapy was first published in 1974 by Sparks, Helm(-Estabrooks), & Albert.

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Melodic Intonation Therapy

- The speech language pathologist (SLP aka "speech therapist") will work with the patient and/or family to select useful phrases.



Shut the door



A cup of coffee

- The person with aphasia learns to hum the melody, sing the phrase with the melody with the SLP (while tapping the left hand), chant the phrase, and finally speak the phrase normally.



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Evidence for Melodic Intonation Therapy

- Studies that have shown that **MIT helps people with aphasia improve verbal production** of trained and sometimes untrained phrases (Sparks et al., 1974; Schlaug, 2008; Parson, 2006; Haro-Martinez et al., 2019; Meulen et al., 2016; and more).
- Some studies have shown that the **rhythm** is the critical component of MIT (Conklyn et al., 2012; Day-O'Connell, 2013; Zumbansen et al., 2014).
- A recent study (Darland, O'Bryan, Bernstorf, & Richburg, submitted) found that the **melodic interval** used makes a difference in how well MIT works.



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How can a person with aphasia get Melodic Intonation Therapy in Wichita?

- **WSU Evelyn Hendren Cassat Speech-Language-Hearing Clinic**
- Although MIT is well-researched and internationally known, I don't know many SLPs who do it in Wichita. WSU is the only place I am sure of.
- WSU provides individual speech therapy for people with aphasia as well as a weekly aphasia support group.



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