

# Brain condition sidelining Bruce Willis has many causes

March 30 2022, by Carla K. Johnson

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Bruce Willis attends a movie premiere in New York on Friday, Oct. 11, 2019. A brain disorder that leads to problems with speaking, reading and writing has sidelined Willis and drawn attention to aphasia, a little-known condition that has many possible causes. Credit: Photo by Charles Sykes/Invision/AP, File

A brain disorder that leads to problems with speaking, reading and

writing has sidelined actor Bruce Willis and drawn attention to a little-known condition that has many possible causes.

A stroke, tumor, head injury or other damage to the language centers of the brain can cause aphasia. A [brain infection](#) or Alzheimer's disease can trigger it.

Former U.S. Rep. Gabby Giffords, wounded in a 2011 shooting, has aphasia from that injury.

The National Aphasia Association estimates 2 million Americans are affected and nearly 180,000 get the disorder every year. Willis' family announced Wednesday that the 67-year-old actor has been diagnosed with aphasia but did not provide any details on a possible cause.

For an actor, [aphasia](#) could pose a huge challenge depending on how severe it is, said Johns Hopkins University cognitive scientist Brenda Rapp, who works with people with the condition.

"You can imagine how frustrating it is if you can't find words, if you can't organize words into sentences, if you can't get your mouth to produce the sounds you want it to produce," Rapp said. "You are still yourself ... but you may not sound like yourself."

For most, the cause is a [stroke](#) that has cut off blood to part of the brain. Without oxygen and nutrients, [brain cells](#) die, which leads to the difficulty retrieving words.

Aphasia does not affect intelligence. Some people improve dramatically in a few months. Others may need to find other ways to communicate. Speech and language therapy can help.

Researchers are looking into new types of [speech](#) therapy and

noninvasive methods such as a procedure that uses [magnetic pulses](#) to stimulate brain cells.

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Citation: Brain condition sidelining Bruce Willis has many causes (2022, March 30) retrieved 5 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2022-03-brain-condition-sidelining-bruce-willis.html>

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