



7D

Voice banking and message banking

**Information for people with or affected by Motor Neurone Disease (MND)
or Kennedy's disease**

If your speech and communication is affected by MND or Kennedy's disease, you may need to consider other ways to communicate. This information sheet explores voice banking and message banking. The content includes:

- 1. What is voice banking?**
- 2. How do I bank my voice?**
- 3. What is message banking?**
- 4. How do I find out more?**



**This content has been evidenced, user tested
and reviewed by experts. See: piftick.org.uk**



This symbol highlights quotes from people living with or affected by MND or Kennedy's disease.



This symbol highlights our information resources to help you explore further. Find out how to download or order printed copies in section 5: **How do I find out more?**

1. What is voice banking?

MND can cause weakness in the tongue, lips, soft palate (the back of the roof of your mouth), vocal cords and chest. This can cause speech to become faint, slurred or unclear. This can also happen if you have Kennedy's disease. If you are affected, you may need to communicate in other ways, which is often called alternative and augmentative communication (AAC).

AAC includes the use of communication aids, which range from low-tech aids, such as a pen and paper, to high-tech aids that are powered by electricity or batteries.



See information sheet **7C Speech and communication support**.

Powered communication aids are often provided with standard voices that speak the messages you enter into them. This can be very useful, but you may feel a loss of identity when communicating with a different voice to your own.



"Knowing that my voice was probably going to be lost spurred me on to look at voice banking."

Voice banking is where you can record yourself reading a set list of sentences, to make all the sounds needed for speaking. A voice banking provider then uses your recording to create a computerised version of your own voice. If needed this can be used on a communication aid, so the voice sounds more like you.

If you do not yet have access to a speech and language therapist (SLT), ask your GP or a member of your health and social care team to refer you.

It is useful to explore options around voice banking and AAC with an SLT and have their support during the voice banking process.

What will my banked voice sound like?

Your banked voice will resemble parts of your natural voice. It won't be identical, but it will sound similar to you. People will usually recognise it as you, rather than a standard voice provided on a powered communication aid.

The clearer your voice is when recording, the higher quality the banked voice will be. This means that the earlier you record your voice, the better. Voice banking is more effective if the phrases are recorded before your voice has been seriously affected by MND or Kennedy's disease.

You can still bank your voice if affected, but you will hear the changes in your voice in the version created by the voice banking provider.

Does voice banking work for everyone?

Voice banking may not be suitable for everyone and you may decide that using other low-tech communication aids works better for you. You may also prefer to use the standard voices that already exist on some devices, as these may be clearer.



"This technology became available too late for me... more emphasis is needed on getting started immediately after diagnosis."

Even when using high-tech or powered communication aids, it is a good idea to get familiar with some low-tech aids as a backup. This way, if your communication aid fails for any reason, you can still communicate another way.

Voice banking can be completed with as few as 50 sentences, or as many as 3000 sentences, depending on the provider you choose to use.

The amount of time taken to record will depend on other factors too, including how tired you get when talking. Voice banking can be completed over as many sessions as you need to take.



"I did about 150 sentences in a session, no more. Don't rush, and try to ensure the room remains quiet without a change in background noise."



See our booklet: **Personal care** for more on managing tiredness (fatigue).

2. How do I bank my voice?

Who can help me to bank my voice?

You may not need any help, but voice banking services provide guidance on their website. The process is usually easy to do, but if you need support, your SLT or health and social care team can usually assist.

Ask your GP or wider health and social care team for referral to an SLT as soon as you can. Being fully informed about voice banking options helps you make decisions based on your needs and preferences. Your SLT can assess your needs to work out which communication aids will best suit you and whether your voice can be successfully banked.

They should be able to provide the equipment. If needed, they may be able to arrange support and training for you and anyone helping. You may need a friend or family member to:

- operate the computer controls required for voice banking programs
- help with anything physical, such as putting on headphones
- download software, log in with passwords, and resolve any technical issues.

Our MND Connect helpline and Communication Aids Service can also provide guidance on the voice banking process and any funding we may be able to offer.



See section 4: **How do I find out more?** for our contact details and a list of other organisations, including some voice banking services.

What equipment will I need to bank my voice?

Check with your speech and language therapist (SLT) or voice banking supplier before buying equipment to bank your voice, as unsuitable purchases can be costly. Your SLT may be able to loan some of the equipment needed for the voice banking process. You will need the following:

Voice banking service

A number of voice banking services are available and new services continue to emerge as the technology improves. Ask your SLT, wider health and social care team or MND Connect for guidance on voice banking providers likely to suit your needs.

You can also ask other people with or affected by MND about voice banking through our online forum: **forum.mndassociation.org** which provides a safe space to share experiences and support.

Computer

Voice banking services are accessed online, so for most services you will need a PC or laptop with access to the internet for at least some parts of the process. Certain services may need you to use a particular internet browser. Your voice banking provider will be able to advise you on this.

The computer you use will also need to have a USB port, so you can plug a suitable microphone into it.

Some services offer the ability to bank on a smartphone or tablet. Others recommend that the quality of voice recording is better when completed with a computer and a headset microphone.

Once created, you can use your banked voice in communication aid apps on your tablet or smart phone. Look at which aids you might want to use before recording, as not all tablets and apps will be compatible with all banked voices.

Your SLT can support you to make this decision and show you examples of communication aids and apps.

Microphone

If using a PC or laptop it is important to use a high-quality headset microphone, as the better the recording is, the better your banked voice will sound. These microphones plug into the USB port of a computer or laptop. Desktop or built-in microphones on PCs or laptops are not suitable.

Your voice banking provider will be able to advise you on the type of microphone they recommend. Position the microphone to the side of the mouth, level with the jaw, to avoid feedback or breathing noises.

Somewhere to do the recordings

Record your voice somewhere quiet with no background noise. It does not need to be as quiet as a recording studio, so voice banking can be done at home. Remove anything that may make a noise, such as a telephone or ticking clock. Recording in a carpeted room with soft furnishings can help reduce any echo.

Some voice banking services will ask for test recordings first to check the recording is suitable.

It is important to record in the same place every time. Try to record at the same time of day, as many people with MND or Kennedy's disease find their voice is strongest in the morning. It can be useful to have a drink to hand to keep your mouth and lips moist.

What does voice banking involve?

Voice banking usually means recording a number of spoken sentences into a computer program. Depending on the voice banking service, the number of sentences you need to record can range from 50-3000. Ask your SLT any questions you have about banking your voice. Voice banking is getting easier as technology improves.

Depending on the strength of your voice and how tired you become, voice banking can take different lengths of time for different people. You can pause and go back to recording at a pace to suit you.



"I found it very therapeutic actually recording my voice. Every day, 10am, coffee and biscuits, shutting myself in my study for an hour a day for 10 days."



See section 4: **How do I find out more?** for our MND Connect helpline contact details.

Our Communication Aids Service at the MND Association can provide guidance on costs and some funding may also be available. You need a compatible device, with the software or app that can use your banked voice. The recording steps are as follows:

1. Register with your preferred voice banking service.
2. Your voice banking provider may ask you to complete a test recording to check the noise levels and microphone are suitable. This is usually straightforward.
3. You can change settings, such as the language, if this is available.
4. Record a short set of phrases and send these to the service to be checked if they ask you to.
5. If the recordings are successful, the voice banking service will tell you to continue recording the remaining phrases.
6. It may take more than one try to get the recording quality right, so don't be discouraged if the first attempt is unsuccessful, or if you make a mistake, you can record it again.
7. Once voice banking is complete, the voice banking service will create a voice from the recordings and ask you to listen to this to check you are happy with the quality. They may give you more than one version to check.
8. Contact the MND Association to apply for funding to download your banked voice. If you don't need to use your banked voice straight away, the voice banking service can store your banked voice for use in the future.

What if I can't bank my voice?

If your voice is weak or unclear, some voice banking services offer repaired synthetic voices that blend in other voices or can even design your own bespoke synthetic voice from scratch.

Alternatively, someone else can record their voice for you to use. This needs to feel right for you both. You may want to ask a friend or relative with a similar voice or accent to help with this. Although their banked voice will not be based on your own voice, it may be closer than standard voices on communication aids. Discuss this first with those close to you, such as a partner or family members, as they may feel differently about you using somebody else's voice to communicate.

If it doesn't feel right to use a repaired voice or someone else's voice, you can still use different types of AAC to communicate with people.

This includes standard voices, already available on powered communication aids. These voices may not sound like you, but should be clear in quality. In most cases, there will be a range of male and female voices on offer, so you have a choice.

3. What is message banking?

Message banking is where you record key phrases and store them to play back exactly as you recorded them. This can be helpful when tone and emotion are important to you or those close to you. For example, when:

- calling your pet over
- laughing
- reading a bedtime story if you have children
- saying 'I love you'.

You can use a combination of banked messages and your banked voice with a communication aid. With message banking, you can only play the exact recordings you have made, so it is a good idea to think ahead with those close to you about the sort of things you may wish to record.

What equipment do I need to bank messages?

You can use specialist software and apps to bank messages. Some communication aid apps have a message banking function and some of the voice banking providers also offer a message banking service. Check with the voice banking provider or discuss with your SLT. You also use devices to record yourself, such as:

- a mobile phone or tablet device
- a computer.

Communication devices and apps that are compatible with a banked voice are also likely to be able to play banked messages. Always check this with your health and social care team or our MND Connect helpline.



See section 4: **How do I find out more?** for contact details.

What is the Communication Access Symbol?



The Communication Access Symbol aims to help you find organisations and venues with staff members trained in communicating with people with communication difficulties. Look out for the symbol as more places adopt it and see: **communication-access.co.uk**

4. How do I find out more?

Other organisations

We cannot endorse organisations, but the following may help your search for further information. Our MND Connect helpline can help you find organisations. See contact details later in this section, under the heading: Our support.

Voice banking services

CereVoice Me

Online voice cloning tool that allows you to create a digital version of your own voice.

Voice compatible on: Windows, Apple OS (Mac) and Android devices

Email: through the website contact page

Website: **cereproc.com/en/products/cerevoiceme**

11ElevenLabs

Voice support, including swift voice cloning to create a digital version of your voice.

Voice compatible on: Windows, Apple OS (Mac) and Android devices

Email: **team@elevenlabs.io**

Website: **elevenlabs.io**

ModelTalker

Speech synthesis software package designed for people experiencing speech loss.

Voice compatible on: Windows, Android, Apple OS (Mac), iOS devices (iPads, iPhones).

Email: **staff@modeltalker.org**

Website: **modeltalker.org**

My-own-voice

This web service allows you to create a synthetic voice using your own voice.

Voice compatible on: Windows, Apple OS (Mac) and iOS (iPads and iPhones), Android.

Email: through the website contact page

Website: **acapela-group.com**

SpeakUnique

Personalised synthetic voices for use in communication aids by blending other voices.

Voice compatible on: Windows, Android and iOS devices (iPads and iPhone).

Email: **info@speakunique.co.uk**

Website: **speakunique.co.uk**

The VoiceKeeper

Voice banking technology to create and preserve your voice. Also available as an iOS (iPad or iPhone) app.

Voice compatible on: Windows devices.

Email: through the website contact page

Website: **thevoicekeeper.com**

Further organisations

AbilityNet

Offer free IT support to older people and disabled people.

Tel: 0800 269 545

Email: **enquiries@abilitynet.org.uk**

Website: **abilitynet.org.uk**

Adult social care services

Use the following search terms to find your local adult social care services.

Website: find your local council at **gov.uk** (England and Wales)
health and social care trusts at **nidirect.gov.uk** (Northern Ireland)
find my council at **careinfoscotland.scot** (Scotland)

Audacity

Free to download software that enables you to make audio recordings.

Website: **audacityteam.org**

Communication Matters

UK-wide organisation supporting people of all ages who find communication difficult.

Tel: 0113 343 1533

Email: **admin@communicationmatters.org.uk**

Website: **communicationmatters.org.uk**

Government information

Online government information about benefits and support.

Website: **gov.uk** (England and Wales)
nidirect.gov.uk (Northern Ireland)
gov.scot (Scotland)

Grid3

Record words and phrases which can be played back. Available in 20 languages.

Email: info@thinksmartbox.com

Website: thinksmartbox.com

MND Scotland

Care, information and research funding for people affected by MND in Scotland.

Tel: 0141 332 3903

Email: info@mndscotland.org.uk

Website: mndscotland.org.uk

Predictable

App designed to make communication easier for people with little or no speech.

Email: support@therapy-box.co.uk

Website: therapybox.co.uk/predictable-english

Tobii Dynavox

Software and apps to help with communication and computer access.

Email: through the website contact page

Website: tobiidynavox.com/collections/apps-software

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Jennifer Benson Independent Speech and Language Therapist.

Richard Cave Advanced Specialist Speech and Language Therapist,
Royal Hospital for Neuro-disability, London.

References

References used to support this resource are available on request:

Email: infofeedback@mndassociation.org

Or write to:

Information feedback,
Motor Neurone Disease Association
Francis Crick House
6 Summerhouse Road
Moulton Park
Northampton NN3 6BJ

Further information

We offer a wide range of information about MND and Kennedy's disease. You may find the following resources helpful, relating to this sheet.

Information sheets

7C Speech and communication support
11C Equipment and wheelchairs

Booklets

Making the most of life
Telling other people about MND
Caring and MND - quick guide

Large guides

Living with MND
Caring and MND - support for you

Other resources

Our animation **What is voice and message banking?** and other animated overviews at: **mndassociation.org/animations**

Search for information by need at: **mndassociation.org/careinfofinder**

Find information for professionals at: **mndassociation.org/professionals**

Download our information at: **mndassociation.org/publications**

Find information in other languages at: **mndassociation.org/languages**

Order printed copies from our MND Connect helpline (see Our support next).

Our support

Every day we support people affected by motor neurone disease, campaign for better care and fund ground-breaking research. Because with MND, every day matters.

We also support people affected by Kennedy's disease.

MND Connect

Our helpline offers practical and emotional support, information and signposting to people with MND, carers, family and professionals. Find out more and current opening times at: **mndassociation.org/mndconnect**

Tel: 0808 802 6262

Email: mndconnect@mndassociation.org

Support services

Find out about our support services at: **mndassociation.org/our-services**

Local and regional support

Find out about our branches and groups at: **mndassociation.org/local-support**

MND Association Benefits Advice Service

For help to identify claims and how to apply, visit: **mndassociation.org/benefitsadvice** or call our MND Connect helpline.

Tel: 0808 802 6262

MND Association website and online forum

Website: **mndassociation.org**

Online forum: **forum.mndassociation.org**

We welcome your views

We'd love to know what you think we're doing well and where we can improve our information for people with MND or Kennedy's disease, their families and carers.

Your anonymous comments may also be used to help raise awareness and influence within our resources, campaigns, and applications for funding.

To give feedback on this or any of our information sheets, access our online form at: **smartsurvey.co.uk/s/infosheets_1-25**

You can request a paper version of the form or provide direct feedback by email: infofeedback@mndassociation.org

Or write to:
Information feedback
Motor Neurone Disease Association
Francis Crick House,
6 Summerhouse Road,
Moulton Park
Northampton NN3 6BJ

Would you like to help with user review of our information?

If you are living with MND or Kennedy's disease, or you are a carer, contact us at: infofeedback@mndassociation.org

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