



7D

Voice banking

Information for people with or affected by motor neurone disease or Kennedy's disease

If you are living with motor neurone disease (MND), it is likely that the muscles in your mouth, throat and chest will be affected. This can cause speech and communication difficulties, and you may need to consider other ways to communicate. If you are living with Kennedy's disease, your speech and communication may also be affected.

This might mean using communication aids. If computer-based, these often have a voice output, so that what you type in can be 'said' out loud. This is usually a synthesised (computerised) voice. If you wish to use a synthesised version of your own voice with a communication aid in the future, you will need to 'bank' your voice before your speech weakens.

This information sheet explains how voice banking works. The content is split into the following sections:

- 1: What is voice banking?**
 - 2: How do I bank my voice?**
 - 3: What if I can't bank my voice?**
 - 4: How do I find out more?**
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 This symbol is used to highlight **our other publications**. To find out how to access these, see *Further information* at the end of this sheet.

 This symbol is used to highlight **quotes** from other people with or affected by MND.



The MND Association has been certified as a producer of reliable health and social care information.

www.England.nhs.uk/tis

1: What is voice banking?

MND can cause weakness in the tongue, lips, soft palate (back of the roof of the mouth), vocal cords and chest, causing speech to become faint, slurred or unclear. If you are affected in this way, you may need to use what's known as alternative and augmentative communication (AAC) to help you communicate.

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

 For more information about a range of speech and communication aids, see: Information sheet 7C – *Speech and communication support*

Powered communication aids often come with a synthesised (computerised) voice that speaks 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, especially if you have lost your own voice entirely.

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

Voice banking is a process where you record yourself speaking a set list of sentences, to create a synthetic version of your own voice. This enables you to use a communication aid with a voice that sounds more like you, which can speak an infinite number of words and phrases.

What will my banked voice sound like?

Your synthetic voice will resemble your tone and pattern of speaking, but as it is a created voice, it will not be absolutely identical to your own. However, your synthetic voice is still likely to sound very similar to yours and people will recognise it as you.

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 significantly affected by MND. Voice banking will not repair your speech in any way, so what you put in is what you get out.

 *“Speech can deteriorate rapidly, as in my husband’s case, so there is a timescale to work towards.”*

You can still bank your voice if MND has started to affect it, but this will be reflected in the synthesised version of your voice that the voice banking provider creates for you.

Does voice banking work for everyone?

Everybody is different, and voice banking may not be suitable for everyone. You may decide low-tech communication aids work better for you, or that you would prefer to use the synthesised voices that already exist on some devices, as these may be of better quality.

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

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

The voice banking process can be demanding, and you may find it tiring. However, you can complete the voice banking process in ‘chunks’ over a number of sessions if needed.

 *“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.”*

 For information on feeling tired, see:
Information sheet 11D – *Managing fatigue*

If your voice is weak or unclear, someone else can record their voice for you to use. You may wish to ask a friend or relative with a similar voice or accent to help with this. Although the synthetic version will not be your voice, it may be closer than the synthetic voices already on offer. If you have a partner, this may be something you wish to discuss with them too, as they may feel differently about hearing a voice that isn’t yours.

2: How do I bank my voice?

This section provides guidance if you are considering banking your voice.

Who can help me to bank my voice?

You might not need any assistance with banking your voice. Some voice banking services may provide guidance on how to bank your voice on their website.

However, if you do need assistance with banking your voice, your health and social care team may be able to support you. Ask for information about voice banking from health and social care professionals as early as possible. Being fully informed about your options can enable you to make decisions based on your needs and preferences.

A speech and language therapist (SLT) may be able to arrange for support and training for you and anyone that can help you record your voice. If you would like to discuss the possibility of voice banking, ask your GP or wider health and social care team for a referral to an SLT as soon as possible. Your SLT can assess your needs to work out which communication aids will best suit you and whether your voice can be successfully banked.

You may also need the help of a friend or family member to:

- operate the computer controls required for voice banking programs
- help with anything physical, for example putting on headphones
- resolve any technical issues
- help with downloading the software, logging in and entering passwords.

The MND Association Communication Aids Service can also provide guidance on the voice banking process. See *Further information* in section 4: *How do I find out more?* for details.

What will I need to bank my voice?

Check with your SLT or voice banking supplier before purchasing 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. The MND Association Communication Aids service may be able to loan laptops and USB headset microphones if you do not own the equipment and it can't be loaned by your SLT. See *Further information* in section 4: *How do I find out more?* for details.

You will need the following:

Voice banking service: A range of voice banking services is available. We are not able to make recommendations, but we detail some of the available options in *Voice banking services* in section 4: *How do I find out more?*

Discuss with your speech and language therapist, or anyone else who may have had experience of voice banking, before making a choice on which voice banking provider will work best for you. There may be opportunities to discuss voice banking with others on our online forum. See *Further information* in section 4: *How do I find out more?* for details.

Computer: Voice banking services are accessed online, so you will need a PC or laptop with access to the internet for at least some parts of the process. Certain services may need 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.

Tablet computers and smart phones are not powerful enough to record your voice well, but they can often be used as a communication aid with the banked voice once it has been created. Look at which communication programme you might want to use before recording, as not all tablets will be compatible with all banked voices.

Microphone: It is important to use a high quality headset microphone, as the better the recording is, the better the synthesised voice will sound. These high quality 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 what 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: You should record your voice somewhere quiet with no background noise. However, 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 and affect the recordings, for example a telephone or ticking clock.

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 - many people with MND find that 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 involves speaking between 600 and 3500 phrases, using a computer program. It can take around a minimum of six to eight hours, depending on the strength of your voice and how tired you become. However, you can spread this out into more manageable chunks over days or weeks, if needed. You can save and return to your recordings whenever you wish to.



"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."

You may need to pay a fee at the start of the voice banking process, or to download your synthetic voice on to your own device. These prices can vary, so contact voice banking providers in advance to find out what charges may be made before you begin the voice banking process. Also check that the voice banking service you choose is compatible with the computer or tablet and the software you wish to use your banked voice on.

The Communication Aids Service at the MND Association can provide guidance on up-to-date costs for each service. The Communication Aids Service may also be able to provide a limited amount of funding to support with the voice banking process. See *Further information* in section 4: *How do I find out more?* for contact details.

The steps are as follows:

1. You need to register with your preferred voice banking service.
2. An initial test will take place (if your voice banking provider requires this) to check the noise levels and microphone are suitable. This is usually very straightforward to do.
3. You can change settings, such as the language, if this is available.
4. A short set of phrases are recorded and then sent to the service to be checked.
5. If the recordings are suitable, you will be notified that you can continue to record the remaining phrases. It may take more than one attempt to get the recording quality right, so don't be discouraged if the first attempt is unsuccessful.

Once recording is complete, your voice banking service will create a voice from the recordings. The voice created will vary depending on the service used. You can then download the voice on to a suitable computer or tablet.

3: What if I can't bank my voice?

If you can't bank your voice for any reason, you can still use low and high-tech AAC to communicate with others. This includes using the built in voices on text to speech software. These voices may not sound like you, but should be of a good quality. In most cases, there will be a range of male and female voices on offer.



"Regardless of which system I used, the problem I had was with the dexterity of my hands. I managed it but I am guessing that if someone has less mobility in their hands that it would be an issue."

As mentioned in section 1: *What is voice banking?* a family member or friend with a similar accent to you may wish to bank their voice for you, if you are both comfortable with this choice.

Is there a simpler option?

'Message banking' is another option, where you record key phrases and store them on an AAC device to play back as needed. This is a simpler and quicker option than voice banking, and will be an exact recording of your voice. However, you would be limited to only the specific phrases you have recorded, rather than an infinite combination of words and phrases.

4: How do I find out more?

Useful organisations

We do not necessarily endorse any of the following organisations, but have included them to help you begin your search for further information. The contact details are correct at the time of print, but may change between revisions. If you need help to find an organisation or have any questions, contact our MND Connect helpline (see *Further information* at the end of this sheet for details).

We have split these organisations into two groups for ease of reference. The first group contains a list of available voice banking providers, and the second a list of other organisations that you may find useful.

Voice banking services

CereVoice Me

Online voice cloning tool that allows you to create a computer version of your own voice. CereVoice Me voices are compatible with various text to speech software programs on Windows, Apple OSX (Mac) and Android devices.

Email: through the website contact page
Website: www.cereproc.com/en/products/cerevoiceme

ModelTalker

Speech synthesis software package designed to benefit people who may lose or are losing their ability to speak. ModelTalker voices are compatible with various text to speech software programs on Windows, Apple OSX (Mac), Android and iOS devices (iPads and iPhones).

Email: beta@modeltalker.org
Website: www.modeltalker.org

My-own-voice

This web service allows you to create a synthetic voice using your own voice. My-own-voice voices are compatible with various text to speech software programs on Windows, Apple OSX (Mac), Android and iOS devices (iPads and iPhones).

Email: through the website contact page
Website: www.acapela-group.com/voices/voice-replacement/

VocaliD

Online synthetic voice creation for people who are losing the ability to speak. VocaliD voices are compatible with various text to speech software programs on Windows devices.

Email: hello@vocalid.co
Website: www.vocalid.co

Other useful organisations

Adult social care services (sometimes called social services)

For adult social care contact your local authority through your area telephone directory, or search for local authorities at GOV.UK

Website: **www.gov.uk**
www.nidirect.gov.uk (for Northern Ireland. Search for *health and social care trusts*)

The Aidis Trust

Charity that provides electronic communication aids and specialised computer equipment to people with disabilities to aid their communication.

Address: 10 Ironmonger Lane, London EC2V 8EY
Telephone: 0808 800 0009
Email: via the website contact page
Website: **www.aidis.org**

Communication Matters

Communication Matters is a UK-wide organisation supporting people of all ages who find communication difficult because they have little or no clear speech.

Address: Leeds Innovation Centre, 103 Clarendon Road, Leeds, LS2 9DF
Telephone: 0845 456 8211
Email: admin@communicationmatters.org.uk
Website: **www.communicationmatters.org.uk**

GOV.UK

Online government advice on a variety of welfare topics, including support for people with disabilities.

Email: email addresses are provided on the website, related to each enquiry
Website: **www.gov.uk**

Information Technology Can Help (ITCH)

The ITCH Network offers free IT support to disabled and older people.

Telephone: 0800 269 545
Email: enquiries@abilitynet.org.uk
Website: **www.itcanhelp.org.uk**

MND Scotland

MND Scotland provides care, information and research funding for people affected by motor neurone disease in Scotland.

Address: 2nd Floor, City View, 6 Eagle Street, Glasgow G4 9XA
Telephone: 0141 332 3903
Email: info@mndscotland.org.uk
Website: **www.mndscotland.org.uk**

NI Direct

Providing government information for Northern Ireland on a variety of welfare subjects, including health services and support for disability.

Email: through the website contact page
Website: **www.nidirect.gov.uk**

Tobii Dynavox message banking

A pilot project allowing people to record and store an unlimited amount of recorded messages.

Address: Sheffield Science Parks, Cooper Building, Arundel Street,
Sheffield, S1 2NS
Telephone: 0114 307 2364
Email: support.uk@tobiiDynavox.com
Website: **www.mytobiidynavox.com/messagebank**

SpeechBubble

A website that helps you find out about the types of communication aids currently available.

Email: through the website contact page
Website: **<http://speechbubble.org.uk>**

References

References used to support this document are available on request from:
Email: **infofeedback@mndassociation.org**

Or write to: Information feedback, MND Association, PO Box 246, Northampton NN1 2PR

Acknowledgements

Special thanks to Lee Millard, living with MND, for his kind permission to use quotes from his work on voice banking. See his blog at: **www.onein400.com**

We would also like to thank the following people for their guidance in the development of this sheet:

Jennifer Benson, Speech and Language Therapist and Cross-Site Clinical Specialist in Dysphagia and Nutrition, Diana, Princess of Wales Hospital, Grimsby

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

Further information

You may find these information sheets from the MND Association helpful:

7C – Speech and communication support

11C – Equipment and wheelchairs

11D – Managing fatigue

We also provide the following guides:

Living with motor neurone disease – our main guide to help you manage the impact of the disease

Caring and MND: support for you – comprehensive information for unpaid or family carers, who support someone living with MND

Caring and MND: quick guide – the summary version of our information for carers

You can download most of our publications from our website at:

www.mndassociation.org/publications or order in print from the MND Connect helpline, who can provide further information and support.

MND Connect can also help locate external services and providers, and introduce you to our services as available, including your local branch, group, Association visitor or regional care development adviser.



MND Connect

Telephone: 0808 802 6262

Email: mndconnect@mndassociation.org

MND Association, PO Box 246, Northampton NN1 2PR

MND Association website and online forum

Website: **www.mndassociation.org**

Online forum: **<http://forum.mndassociation.org>** or through the website.

Communication Aids Service

The Communication Aids Service at the MND Association can provide guidance and support on voice banking, including loans of laptops and microphones to use for the voice banking process. The service may also be able to provide limited financial assistance and communications aids loans if they are unavailable or delayed through social services.

Email: communicationaids@mndassociation.org

We welcome your views

Your feedback is really important to us, as it helps improve our information for the benefit of people living with MND and those who care for them. If you would like to provide feedback on any of our information sheets, you can access an online form at: **www.surveymonkey.com/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, MND Association, PO Box 246 Northampton NN1 2PR

Created: 06/17
Next review: 06/20
Version : 1.0