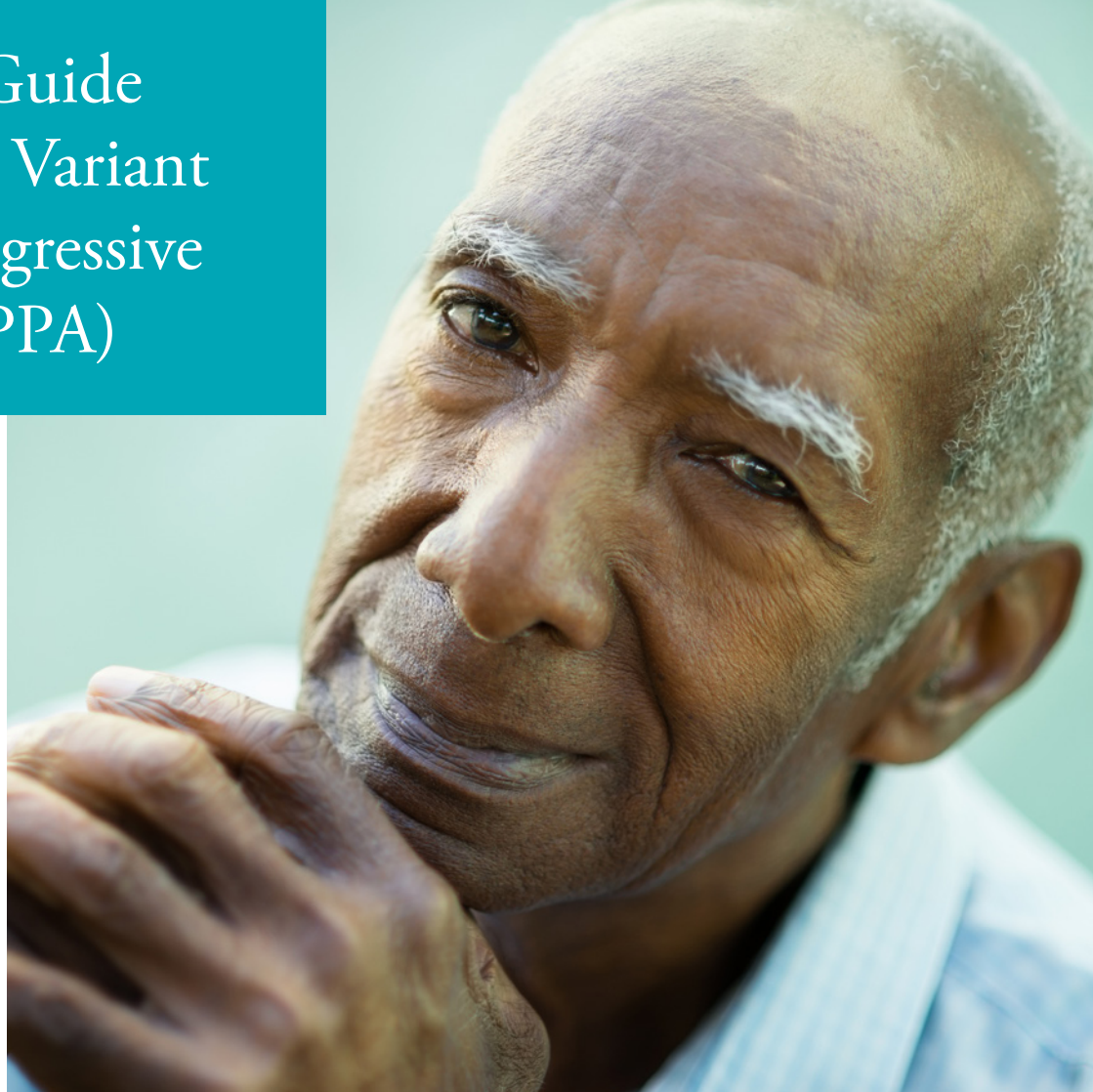


# A Patient's Guide to Semantic Variant Primary Progressive Aphasia (svPPA)

This material is provided  
by UCSF Weill Institute  
for Neurosciences as  
an educational resource  
for patients.



**UCSF** Weill Institute for Neurosciences  
Memory and Aging Center

## What is semantic variant primary progressive aphasia?

Primary progressive aphasia (PPA) is a brain condition that slowly damages parts of the brain that control speech and language. People with PPA usually have difficulty speaking, naming objects, or understanding conversations.

One form of PPA is called the semantic variant (svPPA), and those with svPPA have increasing trouble understanding the meaning of words, finding words, or naming people and objects. As time goes on, people with svPPA begin to use more general names for specific things. For example, they might say "animal" instead of "dog." As their word comprehension gets worse, they may eventually have a hard time understanding conversations.

Because it primarily affects the temporal lobe of the brain, svPPA is considered a subtype of a larger group of brain conditions called frontotemporal dementia (FTD).

## What causes svPPA?

The cause of svPPA is unknown. Scientists know that in svPPA there is a build-up of a protein called TDP-43 in the left side of the brain (specifically the temporal lobe), which controls speech and language. This protein occurs normally, but we do not yet understand what causes it to build up in large amounts in this brain area. As more and more TDP-43 forms in those brain cells, the cells lose their ability to function and eventually die. This causes the temporal lobe of the brain to shrink.

## How is age related to svPPA?

Most people with svPPA start to have symptoms in their 50s or 60s, although some people have shown signs earlier or later.

## What happens in svPPA?

People with svPPA have trouble recognizing and naming familiar objects, people, or places. Over time, they lose the knowledge of what words mean and what objects are. For example, a person with svPPA might not know what a peanut butter sandwich is even though they can still make one. It is more difficult for people with svPPA to express what they want to say.

People with svPPA often develop behavior and personality changes. People with svPPA may also become more confused and disoriented as they recognize fewer familiar places and people. As the disease progresses, people with svPPA may stop talking altogether, or they may speak with a vocabulary of only a few words.

A person with svPPA can live many years with the disease. Research suggests that a person with svPPA may live an average of 12 years with the disease, although this can vary from person to person.

## Are there medicines to treat svPPA?

Though there is no cure for svPPA yet, there are medications that may help manage the symptoms. These medications are called selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs), and they can help if a person with svPPA is having changes in behavior.

## What other things help?

There are various ways to help a person with svPPA. Speech therapy may help improve communication between people with svPPA and others.

Research has shown that physical exercise helps to enhance brain health and improves mood and general fitness. A balanced diet, enough sleep, and limited alcohol intake are other important ways to promote good brain health. Other illnesses that affect the brain, such as diabetes, high blood pressure, and high cholesterol, should also be treated if present.

## Resources

National Aphasia Association: [aphasia.org](http://aphasia.org)

Faces of Aphasia: [facesofaphasia.com](http://facesofaphasia.com)

Aphasia Hope Foundation: [aphasiahope.org](http://aphasiahope.org)

American Stroke Association: [strokeassociation.org](http://strokeassociation.org)

The Association for Frontotemporal Degeneration: [theaftd.org](http://theaftd.org)

Family Caregiver Alliance: [caregiver.org](http://caregiver.org)

National Institutes of Health: [nih.gov](http://nih.gov)

Research: [clinicaltrials.gov](http://clinicaltrials.gov)

