



7D

Voice banking and message 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. If you are living with Kennedy's disease, the muscles in your tongue and lips may be affected. This can cause speech and communication difficulties, and you may need to consider other ways to communicate.

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. If you wish to use a computerised version of your own voice with a communication aid in the future, you can 'bank' your voice.

You can also 'bank' recorded messages, where you may want your communication aid to say things exactly how you would with your natural speech.

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

- 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 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.

This information has been evidenced, user tested and reviewed by experts.

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 communicate in other ways. This 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.



For more information about a range of speech and communication aids, 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, recording 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 have not been referred to a speech and language therapist (SLT) ask the health and social care professionals you are in touch with for one. It is useful to talk through your options around voice banking and AAC and to have SLT support during the process of voice banking.

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. Voice banking will not repair your speech in any way.



"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 you will hear the changes in your own voice reflected in the version created by the voice banking provider.

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. You may also prefer to use the standard voices that already exist on some devices, as these may be clearer. See also *What if I can't bank my voice?* in section 2: *How do I bank my voice?*



"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."



For more on fatigue with MND, see our booklet, *Personal care*

2: How do I bank my voice?

Who can help me to bank my voice?

You might not need any help, but voice banking services should provide guidance on how to bank your voice on their website. The process of voice banking is usually very straightforward. If you need support with this, your health and social care team may be able to assist.

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.

Your speech and language therapist (SLT) may be able to arrange for support and training for you, and for anyone helping you to record your voice. If you would like to discuss 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. Your SLT should be able to provide any equipment they suggest.

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.

MND Connect and our 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 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.

Our MND Association Communication Aids service may be able to loan the necessary equipment if you do not own it or if it cannot be loaned from 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 number of voice banking services are available. We are not able to make recommendations, but to help your search, we have listed some of the available options under *Voice banking services* in section 4: *How do I find out more?* New services continue to emerge as the technology improves. Discuss with your SLT, wider health and social care team or MND Connect, before making a choice on which voice banking provider will work best for you.

You can also ask other people with or affected by MND about voice banking through our online forum, at: <https://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, however, others continue to suggest the quality of the 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 communication programme 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 and affect the recordings, for example 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 - 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 recording yourself saying a number of sentences, using a computer program. Depending on which voice banking service you choose, 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. For a list of voice banking services see Useful organisations in Further information at the end of this sheet.

You can also contact our Communication Aids Service, See *Further information* in section 4: *How do I find out more?* for details.

Depending on the strength of your voice and how tired you become, voice banking can take different lengths of time for different people. However you choose to start banking your voice you can always pause and go back to reading and 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."

The Communication Aids Service at the MND Association can provide guidance on costs for each service. The service also provides funding for people living with MND to bank their voice. See *Further information* in section 4: *How do I find out more?* for contact details.

You need to have a compatible device, with the correct software or app that your banked voice can be programmed into.

The 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.
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 will safely store your banked voice in case you need to use it in the future.

Once recording is complete, your voice banking service will create a voice from the recordings. Some providers will send more than one version so that you can choose the version you like best.

For more information, contact our Communication Aids Service. For details, see *Further information* in section 4: *How do I find out more?*

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 with 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 using a 'repaired' voice or asking someone else to bank their voice for you does not feel right, you can still use different types of AAC to communicate with people. This includes using the standard voices 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.



For suggestions on how to open conversations about the disease, see our booklet: *Telling other people about MND*

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 particularly important, for example:

- calling your pet over
- your laugh
- reading a bed time 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 for more information. You may also be able to use devices you may already own to make recordings, 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, MND Connect or the MND Association Communication Aids Service (see *Further information* at the end of this sheet for contact details).

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 in alphabetical order for ease of reference. The first group contains a list of currently 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.

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

Email: through the website contact page

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

I Will Always Be Me

Bank your voice by reading a short online storybook called *I Will Always Be Me*. Developed by leading technology companies, including Dell and Intel, this project is supported by the MND Association. After recording the storybook SpeakUnique creates your digital voice which can be used with the SpeakUnique app on a communication aid. (See *SpeakUnique* below)

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

Email: support@iwillalwaysbeme.com

Website: www.iwillalwaysbeme.com

ModelTalker

Speech synthesis software package designed to benefit people who may have lost or are losing their ability to speak.

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

Email: staff@modeltalker.org

Website: www.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: www.acapela-group.com/solutions/my-own-voice

SpeakUnique

Creates personalised synthetic voices for use in communication aids by blending other voices. Speak Unique also provides the voice recorded through *I will always be me* storybook (see above)

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

Email: info@speakunique.co.uk

Website: www.speakunique.co.uk

The VoiceKeeper

Voice banking technology to create and preserve an authentic version of your voice. Also available as an iOS (iPad or iPhone) app requiring no need for a laptop, PC or headset microphone.

Voice compatible on: Windows devices.

Email: through the website contact page

Website: www.thevoicekeeper.com

Other useful organisations

AbilityNet

Offer free IT support to older people and disabled people.

Telephone: 0800 269 545

Email: enquiries@abilitynet.org.uk

Website: **www.abilitynet.org.uk**

Adult social care services (sometimes called social services)

For adult social care contact your local authority in England and Wales, or your local health and social care trust in Northern Ireland.

Website: **www.gov.uk**
(for England and Wales, search for *local authorities*)
www.nidirect.gov.uk
(for Northern Ireland, search for *health and social care trusts*)

Audacity

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

Website: **www.audacityteam.org**

Communication Matters

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

Address: 3rd Floor, University House, University of Leeds, Leeds LS2 9JT
Telephone: 0113 343 1533
Email: admin@communicationmatters.org.uk
Website: **www.communicationmatters.org.uk**

GOV.UK

Online government advice for people in England and Wales on a variety of welfare topics, including support for disabled people.

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

Grid3

Record words and phrases which can be played back. Available in 20 languages, over time it gets quicker and more accurate in predicting sentences based on what has been said before. Symbols or text can be used, making it suitable for a wide range of people.

Email: info@thinksmartbox.com
Website: **https://thinksmartbox.com**

MND Scotland

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

Address: 6th Floor Merchant Street Exchange, 20 Bell street Glasgow G1 1LG
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 disabled people.

Email: through the website contact page

Website: **www.nidirect.gov.uk**

Predictable

An app designed to make communication easier and quicker for people with little or no speech, some or all of the time.

Email: support@therapy-box.co.uk

Website: **www.therapy-box.co.uk/predictable**

Tobii Dynavox

Software and apps to help with communication and computer access. Choose how you want to communicate by using the search engine to refine your choices by need.

Email: through the website contact page

Website: **www.tobiidynavox.com/collections/apps-software**

References

References used to support this document are available on request from:

Email: infofeedback@mndassociation.org

Or write to:

Information feedback, MND Association, Francis Crick House, 6 Summerhouse Rd,
Moulton Park Industrial Estate,

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<https://jbensonspeechtherapy.co.uk>

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

We also provide the following guides:

Living with motor neurone disease – our main guide to help manage 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

Making the most of life with MND – ways to continue activities or hobbies you enjoy.

Telling other people about MND - ways to communicate about the disease to family, children, friends and health and social care professionals, including using advocates.

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 MND Association staff.

MND Connect

Telephone: 0808 802 6262

Email: mndconnect@mndassociation.org

MND Association, Francis Crick House, 6 Summerhouse Rd,

Moulton Park,

Northampton NN3 6BJ

MND Association website and online forum

Website: **www.mndassociation.org**

Online forum: **<https://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 health and social care services.

Email: communicationaids@mndassociation.org

What is the Communication Access Symbol?

The Communication Access Symbol aims to help you find organisations and venues with staff members trained to communicate with people with communication difficulties. The symbol is still in its early days, with a small number of organisations currently trained and displaying the symbol. Look out for the symbol as more places adopt the symbol For more information, see: www.communication-access.co.uk



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 or affected by MND, or Kennedy's disease. Your anonymous comments may also be used to help raise awareness and influence within our resources, campaigns and applications for funding.

To feedback on any of our information sheets, access our online form at: www.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, MND Association, Francis Crick House, 6 Summerhouse Rd, Moulton Park, Northampton NN3 6BJ

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