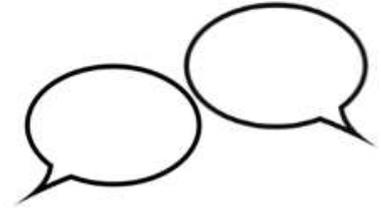


Speech and Language Therapy – What is Dysarthria?

Introduction

This leaflet provides information to patients and their families about Dysarthria.



What is Dysarthria?

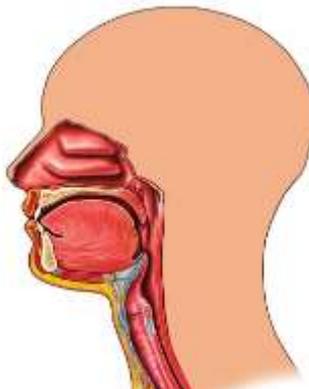
Dysarthria is a motor-speech disorder that results in unclear speech. The inability to speak clearly is because of weak, slow or uncoordinated movements in the muscles and anatomy associated with the mouth, voice and lungs.

What causes Dysarthria?

Dysarthria results from damage to the nervous system, this can be caused by a range of conditions, including:

- Stroke
- Head injury
- Brain tumour
- Motor Neurone Disease
- Parkinson's Disease
- Multiple Sclerosis

There are several different types of dysarthria. The type of dysarthria a person has is determined by the area of the nervous system which is damaged. Dysarthria can range from a mild annoyance, to having a devastating impact on a person's ability to express themselves and make themselves understood.



What you may notice

Dysarthria can affect people in different ways.

- Some people sound like they're mumbling, or slurring their words.
- Some people can run out of breath when they are talking.
- Some people may speak very quickly, some slowly, and some may fluctuate.
- Some people may speak loudly, or softly, and some are irregular in volume.
- Some people may have voice changes and sound breathy, weak, husky or strained.
- Someone with dysarthria may look as if their face is drooping. Due to limited movement of the tongue, lips and jaw, the person may drool or have difficulty keeping dentures in place.

How can Speech and Language Therapy help?

Speech and language therapists identify and assess patients with dysarthria. Therapy sessions aim to improve clarity of speech and expression of language and can include:

- Clear speech strategies: Slowing down the rate of speech, over-exaggerating each word and increasing volume as comfortable.
- Communication partner training: Providing information and strategies to the person's family and friends to facilitate more effective communication.
- Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) – Speech and language therapists may assess whether a person may benefit from using alphabet charts, picture boards or apps to facilitate communication.
- Personalised therapy around goals that matter to the person affected e.g. ordering from a menu in a restaurant, speaking to a friend on the phone etc.
- Total communication strategies: Teaching a person to use alternative methods of communication to support their spoken communication e.g. drawing, gesture, writing, facial expression.
- Working with the medical team to address management of excessive saliva

Strategies for Clear Speech:

Things to try:

- Reduce background noise and distractions, such as TV or radios. It can be hard to talk over these and it may make you more difficult to understand.
- Try to maintain a good posture. This will help support your breathing and give your voice more power.
- Make sure that you and the person you are talking to are facing each other.
- Speak more slowly. This gives your muscles the best chance of moving accurately and will make your speech less slurred.
- Take regular breaths. If you try to say too much on one breath, your voice may fade away and become difficult to understand.
- Try to exaggerate or over-pronounce words. Say every syllable as clearly as possible.
- Keep the volume of your voice loud enough to be easily heard. Make sure you're opening your mouth enough for your voice to be heard.

If speaking is especially difficult...

- Plan what you want to say in advance. Shorter sentences will be easier to say and will be more easily understood.
- Only say the key words of a sentence. Instead of "can you put the milk in the fridge please?" you could say "milk, fridge".
- Use gesture or writing to get your message across.

Remember...

Speaking may be more difficult when you're tired, upset, unwell or under pressure. Take your time and take regular breaks.

Tips for family and friends:

- Make the environment that you're speaking in as quiet and distraction-free as possible. Turn down any music/TV or move to a quieter room.
- Face the person you're speaking to so that you can pick up clues about what they're saying through facial expression, gesture and lip-reading.
- Give the person plenty of time to talk. Try to be patient.
- Try not to guess or pre-empt what you think the person is saying, unless they have said that they don't mind and find it useful.
- Be honest if you don't understand what the person is saying. Check regularly that you have understood by summarising what the person has said and/or asking if you got certain details right.

