

Dysarthria

Dysarthria (pronounced diss-ARE-three-uh) is when your speech sounds slurred due to an issue with your brain.

Dysarthria happens when you have trouble using the muscles you need for speech.

You might also have trouble controlling the loudness or speed of your speech or how 'natural' it sounds.

Dysarthria does not affect your intelligence. You can still understand language, think of words and read and write.

There are many reasons that someone might have trouble speaking clearly. It is only called dysarthria if the cause is related to your brain.

Causes of dysarthria

Some of the common causes of dysarthria include:

- neurological conditions you are born with, like cerebral palsy or Down syndrome
- conditions or injuries affecting your brain, like stroke, head injury, Parkinson's, multiple sclerosis, or Huntington's disease tumours
- conditions affecting your brain and nerves, like motor neurone disease
- conditions or injuries affecting your nerves or how they work, like myasthenia gravid or nerve damage due to surgery or accidents.

Types of dysarthria

Everyone's dysarthria is different. This is because different parts of the brain and nerves control different components of speech.

Dysarthria can be very mild. You might occasionally have trouble being understood when you are tired or in a noisy place.

It can also be very severe. You might not be able to produce understandable speech. You might need to communicate in other ways, like using a communication device.

Some people with dysarthria speak clearly but sound 'robotic' or speak slowly.

Others may have slurred speech or may have difficulty controlling how loudly they talk.

Dysarthria may also change over time.

It can improve after a stroke or head injury.

It can get worse if it is caused by conditions such as motor neuron disease or Parkinson's.

How dysarthria can affect you

How dysarthria affects you will depend on you, your environment and what you do.

Dysarthria can make it hard for people to understand you. They might make negative assumptions about your intelligence and independence.

Many of the places where we usually talk are busy, noisy, and full of distractions.

We might do other things when we talk, like eating and drinking, driving, or looking at our phones.

If you have dysarthria, this can make it harder for people to understand you.

You might feel frustrated, lose confidence, avoid socialising and become isolated.

Dysarthria might affect your ability to do things like reading aloud and giving presentations.

People with dysarthria may also find it harder to speak on the phone or use voice activated devices.

Even if your dysarthria is mild, you can still get frustrated when people are impatient with you or make assumptions about you.

How a speech pathologist can help

A speech pathologist will ask you about your speech, and what you want to work on.

They will listen to how you talk and test how your speech muscles are working.

They might work with you to try and improve the clarity, ease and naturalness of your speech.

They also might talk to you about how your speech could change over time. They might suggest other ways to communicate, such as using written information or an electronic device.

If you have a condition that will get worse, you may be able to record your speech and use it later through an electronic device.

Speech pathologist will also give you advice about how other factors might affect your ability to communicate (such as background noise, lighting, time of day).

If there are people you often talk to, your speech pathologist can give them advice about how they can help to make your conversations easier and more enjoyable.

Tips for communicating with someone with dysarthria

Set up the environment

Choose somewhere quiet to talk.

Make sure you can see the person with dysarthria's face.

Talk at a time of day that is easiest for the person with dysarthria.

Make sure anything that might help communication is available (like pen and paper, communication device, microphone).

Share the conversation

Be aware of your role in the conversation.

Are you always asking the person with dysarthria questions?

Are you giving them time to respond?

Are you giving them opportunities to ask you questions?

Be comfortable with some silence. Be patient. Let the person be themselves.

Know how (and if) to help.

Ask the person with dysarthria what you should do if you are having trouble understanding them.

Be honest about how the conversation is going.

If you don't understand something the person says, let them know and give them some specific suggestions about how to make it easier for you understand, such as:

- 'I didn't understand that last word.'
- 'Could you say it again more slowly, or use a different word?'
- 'Can we turn off the TV?'
- 'Do you have a communication aid we can use?'

For more support

- Visit [Speech Pathology Australia](#) to [Find a speech pathologist](#).
- Talk with your GP or health professional
- Contact the [National Disability Insurance Scheme](#) (NDIS) (for those under 65 years), or [My Aged Care](#) (for those over 65 years).