



Beacon Hospital

ADVICE ON COMMUNICATING WITH DYSARTHRIA

The following techniques may be useful for times when your speech may be difficult to understand. The items that are checked may be the most appropriate for you. These techniques enhance the understandability of your speech by providing your listener with some extra cues.

- Provide context for what you are saying.** Knowing the topic of conversation makes a big difference in understanding speech. If your speech is difficult to understand, provide the context by writing or spelling the topic of your message.
- Don't shift topics abruptly.** If your speech is difficult to understand, your partners may get lost if you change from one topic to another without a transition. Let people know that you are changing topic and what the new topic is.
- Turn-taking signals.** Conversations tend to get very quickly. If your speech is slow, you may need to use clear signals that you want a turn. These signals may take the form of an eye gaze, a breathing pattern, a body movement, a gesture, or verbal interjection. Choose one or two that work for you and make sure listeners are aware of them.
- Get your listener's attention.** It is impossible for any listener to understand unless he or she is paying attention. If your speech is difficult to understand, it is even more important that listeners are paying attention. Before you begin a message, alert your communication partner by saying his or her name.
- Use complete sentences.** Grammatically complete sentences are usually easier for listeners to understand. Avoid telegraphic sentences or those in which the "little" grammatical words are deleted.
- Use predictable types of sentences.** Simple, grammatically predictable sentences are generally easier to understand than longer grammatically complicated sentences.
- Use predictable wording.** There are many ways to communicate a single idea. If your speech is difficult to understand, avoid unusual idioms or slang expressions. Be direct. For example, "Close the window, please," may be easier to understand than, "I wouldn't mind if you would close the window."
- Watch the tone of your voice.** We communicate much information by changing the tone of voice. For example, the phrase "You really look terrific" may mean two completely different

things depending on how you say it. If you have difficulty expressing subtle changes in meaning with your intonation, you'll need to express sarcasm or humor in other ways.

- Rephrase your message.** If listeners have not understood you even after you've repeated the message, try communicating the thought using different words. But use a signal to let them know.
- Accompany speech with simple gestures when appropriate.** For example, the palm extended in a halting motion, then a circular motion with index finger may accompany the message, "Stop and turn around where you are."
- Take advantage of situational cues.** For example, you might point to objects in the room in order to introduce a topic.
- Make the environment as "friendly" as possible.** Some communication environments are more difficult than others. Avoid carrying out important conversations in noisy places or in places where your communication partner cannot watch you as you speak, for example, in dimly lit rooms or in situations where your listener is a long distance from you.
- Avoid communication over long distances.** Trying to speak with someone who is across the room or in another room is difficult. If you need to call attention to yourself, a phone, buzzer, beeper, or baby monitor may be useful.
- Alphabet board supplementation.** If your speech is very difficult to understand, you may want to point to the first letter of each word as you say it. This reduces your speaking rate/speed, allowing weakened muscles more time to formulate the precise movements of the speech sounds. It also provides the listener with information about the word being spoken. If a word is not understood even when the first letter of the word has been identified, you can resolve the misunderstanding by spelling out the word in its entirety.
- Communicating emotional messages.** Take care to communicate "emotionally loaded" messages when you are not tired and when there is plenty of time.
- Have a handy backup system.** Have a highly understandable communication system handy in case of difficulty. This may be as simple as a pad of paper and pencil to write cue words. Generally, we advise speakers not to let their listener get absolutely lost. Understanding little or nothing of a message can be very frustrating to a listener. If you see that someone is not understanding you, stop and make sure that he or she understands before you continue.