



Beacon Hospital

What is Dysarthria?

Dysarthria is a **motor speech disorder**. The muscles of the mouth, face, and respiratory system may become weak or move slowly after a stroke or during the course of other neurological conditions (e.g. Parkinson's disease, Motor Neuron Disease, tumour). The type and severity of dysarthria depend on which area of the nervous system is affected.

What are some signs or symptoms of dysarthria?

A person with dysarthria may experience any of the following symptoms, depending on the extent and location of damage to the nervous system:

- "Slurred" speech
- Speaking softly or barely able to whisper
- Slow rate / speed of speech
- Rapid rate of speech with a "mumbling" quality
- Limited tongue, lip, and jaw movement
- Abnormal intonation (rhythm or pitch) when speaking
- Changes in vocal quality ("nasal" speech or sounding "stuffy")
- Hoarseness
- Breathiness
- Drooling or poor control of saliva
- Chewing and swallowing difficulty

How is dysarthria diagnosed?

A speech and language therapist (SLT) can evaluate a person with speech difficulties and determine the nature and severity of the problem. The SLT will

look at movement of the lips, tongue, and face, as well as breath support for speech, voice quality, and more.

Another motor speech disorder is apraxia. An important role of the SLP is to determine whether the person's speech problems are due to dysarthria, apraxia, or both.

What treatment is available for people with dysarthria?

Treatment depends on the cause, type, and severity of the symptoms. An SLT works with the individual to improve communication abilities.

Possible Goals of Treatment

- Slowing the rate of speech
- Improving the breath support so the person can speak more loudly
- Strengthening oral muscles
- Increasing mouth, tongue, and lip movement
- Improving articulation so that speech is more clear
- Teaching caregivers and family members strategies to better communicate with the person with dysarthria
- In severe cases, learning to use alternative means of communication (e.g., simple gestures, alphabet boards, or electronic or computer-based equipment)

What can I do to communicate better with a person with dysarthria?

It is important for both the person with dysarthria and the people he or she communicates with to work together to improve interactions. Here are some tips for both speaker and listener.

Tips for the Person With Dysarthria

- Use shorter phrases
- Check with listeners to make sure that they understood you
- Speak slowly and loudly; pause frequently
- Try to limit conversations when you feel tired, when your speech will be harder to understand

- If you become frustrated, try to use other methods, such as pointing or gesturing, to get your message across, or take a rest and try again later

Tips for the Listener

- Reduce distractions and background noise
- Pay attention to the speaker
- Watch the person as he or she talks
- Let the speaker know when you have difficulty understanding him or her
- Repeat only the part of the message that you understood so that the speaker does not have to repeat the entire message
- If you still don't understand the message, ask yes/no questions or have the speaker write his or her message to you

If you require assessment of speech or treatment for speech difficulties, please contact the Speech and Language Therapy Department on (01) 293 6692