

Speech Therapy

Contact an SLP (Speech-Language Pathologist) for an assessment or consultation. The SLP will evaluate the nature and severity of a person's dysarthria.

Treatment, if recommended, may include:

- Exercises designed to strengthen and/or stimulate speech muscles
- Practice using techniques that make speech easier to understand such as slowing the rate or exaggerating movements
- Caregiver or family training and/or counseling
- If needed, alternative means of communication can be introduced to supplement speech (e.g. gestures, spelling or word boards, computerized devices)

Any swallowing, language, or cognitive-communication concerns that may co-exist with dysarthria can also be addressed by the SLP.

For more information

Contact your local hospital or health unit to learn about Speech Pathology services in your area.

Websites

For information about dysarthria and other communication impairments:

- Speech-Language & Audiology Canada: sac-oac.ca
- American Speech-Language- Hearing Association: asha.org

For information about Speech- Language Pathology in British Columbia or to find a private therapist: www.sac-oac.ca/public

www.fraserhealth.ca

This information does not replace the advice given to you by your healthcare provider.

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To order: patienteduc.fraserhealth.ca

Dysarthria

Speech-Language Pathology

About Slurred Speech



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What is 'dysarthria'?

(say *dis-arh-three-ah*)

Dysarthria is difficulty speaking due to **weakness, slowness, or incoordination** of the muscles used for speech (mouth, face, voice, and breathing).

Dysarthria is caused by damage to the nervous system from:

- stroke
- head injury
- brain tumour
- congenital disorders such as Cerebral Palsy
- degenerative diseases such as ALS, MS, or Parkinson's

There are several **different types** of dysarthria depending on the area of the nervous system affected:

- **Unilateral:** one side of the face and tongue is weak
- **Spastic:** muscles are stiff and uncoordinated
- **Flaccid:** muscles are loose and floppy
- **Ataxic:** muscle movements are uncoordinated
- **Hyperkinetic:** involuntary muscle movements occur
- **Hypokinetic:** muscle movements are slow to start

What might it look like?

The speech of a person with dysarthria may have the following characteristics:

- slurred (imprecise)
- mumbled
- too nasal (air through the nose)
- sound stuffed-up (hyponasal)
- monotone or extreme changes in pitch
- slow, fast, or irregular rate
- change in voice (hoarse, breathy, strained, etc.)
- soft, loud, or irregular volume

The person may also experience:

- facial droop
- limited movement of the tongue, lips, or jaw
- drooling
- difficulty swallowing
- difficulty retaining dentures
- pocketing food in the cheeks
- irregular breathing patterns

Dysarthria can be a mild annoyance or can have a devastating impact on a person's ability to make themselves understood.

What can you do?

Tips for the **listener**:

- Find a quiet, well-lit place to talk.
- Turn off the TV and radio, shut the door, and turn on the lights or open the curtains.
- Sit face to face so you can make eye contact. A lot of information comes from watching body language and lip movements.
- If you don't understand, repeat exactly what you understood and ask specifically for the words that were unclear.
- Don't pretend to understand; be patient, and give plenty of time.

Tips for the **person with dysarthria**:

- Sit upright, facing your listener.
- Speak slowly and loudly, pausing frequently to take a breath.
- Exaggerate your speech sounds.
- Establish the topic so you both know what you are talking about.
- Use facial expression, gesture, writing, or pointing to help clarify your message.
- Try rephrasing what you said.
- Remain calm. It's okay to give up and come back to it later.
- Avoid important conversations when you are tired or emotional.