

What is dysarthria?

Dysarthria can be caused by a stroke, head injury and some neuromuscular diseases such as Parkinson's disease, Multiple Sclerosis and Motor Neurone Disease.

Dysarthria is a speech disorder resulting from difficulties in controlling muscle movements. There are many different aspects of dysarthria e.g.

- Speech may sound monotonous, slurred, explosive, weak and/or quiet.
- The person may find it difficult to make themselves understood or even to say a single word.

Many of these features are made worse when the person is tired, anxious, excited or hurried and if there is a hearing loss or a problem with ill-fitting dentures.

Are there associated difficulties?

Dysarthria may be accompanied by:

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| Dysphagia | - | difficulty with chewing and/or Swallowing food and drink. |
| Aphasia | - | a difficulty understanding and using spoken language. |
| Facial Weakness | - | the face may droop on one or both sides. |

What can be done to lessen the effects of dysarthria?

1. Listen particularly for the beginnings and endings of words and the speed of your speech. Try to slow down and pause frequently.
2. Try to reduce background noise such as TV and radio when having a conversation.
3. Try to ensure a good sitting position when speaking i.e. sitting up straight. Sit close to and face the listener in order to save energy.
4. If speech has not been understood try repeating slowly and/or phrasing. Do not give up!
5. If exercises have been given by the speech and language therapist, try to carry them out regularly. Little and often is better than tiring yourself once a week.

Would a communication aid help?

Some people benefit from communication aids such as amplifiers, word and letter boards or electronic equipment. However, it is important to consult a speech and language therapist, as an inappropriate aid can be detrimental and costly.

What can you do as the speaker?

1. Move away from, or turn down background noise such as the TV.
2. Plan what you are going to say.
3. Use pauses to give you time to think about your next idea.
4. Try not to flit from one topic to the next without giving the listener time to respond.

5. Emphasize key words a little.
6. Avoid repeating phrases for the sake of it. Repeat a phrase only if the listener has not understood.
7. Try to maintain normal eye contact with the listener.
8. Make sure that you are speaking out rather than your voice aiming at the floor.
9. If you are stuck for a word you will have to talk round it, but try not to get distracted and lose the thread of your original idea.
10. Ask listeners you know well to give you feedback about your speech so that you can attempt to change a little.
11. Use any alphabet charts or pen and paper etc if you are struggling.

Nevertheless remember that speech and communication is a pleasure not a chore so above all relax and be yourself.

Talking on the telephone can be more difficult than speaking face to face, particularly if you are dealing with a stranger. In addition to the above the following points might help you.

1. Take particular care when saying your name and address. If it helps have them written on a piece of paper you can keep by the phone so you can make sure you read the information slowly and carefully.
2. Write down any particular phrases you want to use, or questions you need to ask.
3. Try to keep your phrases short and to the point. Avoid rambling explanations if you can.
4. If you are worried about remembering information you have been given in a call, ask for written information.
5. Make phone calls when you have plenty of time.

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