

Learning about Dysarthria

One of a series of pamphlets about Speech after Stroke

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A stroke is damage to part of the brain. It happens when a blood vessel in the brain gets blocked or when it bursts.

A stroke can cause many different problems, depending on the part and amount of the brain that is damaged.

This pamphlet explains the effect on speech called **dysarthria**.

Dysarthria happens when the speech muscles become weak after a stroke. It can affect the lips, tongue, throat, or any combination of these parts.

Some people with dysarthria have slurred speech. This is because their tongue cannot move as quickly or as accurately as it used to.

Other people with dysarthria have a hoarse-sounding voice. This is because the muscles in their voice box do not move as well as they used to.

Sometimes the dysarthria is very severe and you are hardly able to understand the person's speech. Other times the dysarthria is mild and may only affect certain sounds, like "s", "t" or "ch".

People who just have dysarthria are able to think just fine. In fact, they can understand you and know exactly what they want to tell you.

Most importantly, their intelligence has not changed.

So what can you do to help?

The best thing to do is to speak with the person who has had the stroke, as well as to his/her Speech-Language Pathologist. They will be able to give you specific ideas about how you can help.

Here are some suggestions to keep in mind when speaking with a person with dysarthria:

- ✓ Stay relaxed and allow the person enough time to speak
– the dysarthria will get worse if the person is rushed or excited.
- ✓ Make sure the topic of conversation is clearly established.
- ✓ Keep a copy of the alphabet handy. This way, the person with dysarthria can point to the first letter of the word he/she is saying to help you understand.
- ✓ Encourage the person to use different ways of “speaking” – like pointing, gesturing, drawing simple pictures, or writing down some key words (if they are able to write). Using this suggestion is like giving someone a cane to help them walk.

More suggestions ...

- ✓ Encourage the person to speak in shorter sentences.
- ✓ If you still cannot understand, try asking questions which can be answered by “yes” or “no”. Or, ask questions with choices, such as “Would you like coffee or tea?”.
- ✓ Try not to shout. Dysarthria does not affect a person’s hearing.
- ✓ Do not be too particular. If you understood the person’s message, do not worry if it was not spoken perfectly.

If you would like more information, please call the Speech-Language Pathologist below:

This series was written by Justine Lear and Deidre Sperry, Speech-Language Pathologists.