



A guide to...

Dysarthria for relatives and carers

Patient Information

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What is Dysarthria?

Dysarthria is a difficulty in producing speech due to muscle weakness and/or poor coordination of the speech mechanism.

How does it affect the person's speech?

It usually affects:

- articulation (speech sounds more slurred)
- the control of volume (speech sounds quiet or too loud)
- vocal quality (speech sounds hoarse)
- rate and coordination of speech (speech sounds monotonous and in turn people may find it difficult to hear).

What you can do to help?

Strategies:

The following strategies may help in having a more successful conversation with somebody whose speech is not as intelligible as it once was.

1. **Ensure quiet surroundings** when the individual is talking to you; eg turn off the radio, TV etc. This is so that they are not competing with other noise and using up all their breath.
2. Position yourself so that you **have good eye contact**. The individual's facial expression and lip movements will aid your understanding of their speech.
3. Encourage the individual to **establish the topic of conversation**. This will help you anticipate what he/she may say.
4. Encourage the individual to **slow down his/her rate of speaking** in order to improve the clarity of the sounds. Sometimes it is useful to prompt the individual to say the key words or speak one word at a time.
5. Encourage the individual to use **facial expression, miming and emphasis** when talking. Find out if he/she can **write or spell out words to communicate**.
6. **Be aware that speaking may be an effort** and therefore frustrating. Try to reassure them that you are interested and value what they have to say.
7. **Don't pretend that you have understood** what the individual has said to you. Instead let him/her know that you have not understood and help them to clarify their message by using some of the above strategies.

Oro-facial exercises:

- The Speech and Language Therapist may have also provided the patient with oro-facial exercises to practise.
- These facial exercises will help the strength and range of motion for the lips, cheek and tongue to aid with speaking clearly and muscle weakness.
- Please encourage him/her to carry these out regularly (at least x3 per day).
- Full instructions are provided on their hand-out of what is required.

Tips!

- It would be helpful to bring in a mirror in order to support the patient in carrying these exercises regularly and for them to see their progress.
- It may be fun doing the exercises together!

If you would like to discuss the information in this leaflet further, please speak to the speech and language therapist.