

# Learning About Apraxia of Speech



## What is apraxia of speech?

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Apraxia of speech makes it hard to speak well. People who have it understand language and know what they want to say. Their mouth and throat muscles are strong enough. But the brain can't plan the order and timing needed for those muscles to move together to create speech that's clear or correct.

## What causes it?

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Apraxia of speech can be caused by several things. These include a stroke, an injury to the head, a brain tumor, or a disease of the nervous system. Sometimes it's caused by a condition that gets worse over time. In that case, the apraxia of speech may get worse too.

## What are the symptoms?

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If you have apraxia of speech, you may:

- Speak slowly.
- Often pause or struggle to say something.
- Be able to say only a few words clearly.
- Be able to make single sounds, but not be able to put them together into longer words or phrases.
- Sometimes say the wrong sound in a word, leave out some sounds, or make sounds in the wrong order.
- Be able to say a word or phrase in some situations, but not in others.

## How is it diagnosed?

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Your doctor will do a physical exam. You will also be asked questions about your past health. Your doctor may refer you to a speech-language pathologist (SLP).

Your doctor or SLP may suggest other tests. These tests are used to find out if you've had a stroke, a brain tumor, an injury to your brain, or a disease of your nervous system. Your doctor may use an MRI or other imaging test. This can help find out what might be going on in your brain that is causing your speech problem.

The SLP will also listen to you talk. They will watch how you say sounds and combinations of sounds. The SLP will also listen to how you pause between phrases, how you put stress on parts of words, and how loudly you speak.

## How is it treated?

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Your doctor or speech-language pathologist may help improve apraxia of speech by giving you:

- Methods to help make your speech clearer.
- Strategies to help you communicate better.
- A computer or other device, if needed, to help you communicate.

You may need frequent speech therapy sessions. Your health care team will help you decide on the best schedule for treatment.

## How can others help you cope?

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Your family and friends can help you communicate better. Share these simple tips with them. Encourage them to:

- Be patient, understanding, and supportive.
- Speak directly to you and give you enough time to talk.
- Limit background and other noises like screens and music.
- Not correct your pronunciation.
- Ask you to repeat something if they don't understand. Or make sure you understand what they said by asking you "yes" or "no" questions.
- Now and then, repeat back what you said. This helps confirm that they understand the message.

## What are some tips for coping?

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Speech disorders can make it frustrating to talk with others. But there are some things you can do to make it easier.

- Give yourself time to get the words out. Be patient with yourself.
- Try to slow down how fast you speak.
- Be patient with others. If they have trouble understanding you, try again.
- Use other methods to help listeners understand you. For example, you can use an alphabet board. Point to the first letter of each word as you say it. Or you can try adding gestures or drawing. You might also use special apps on devices such as smartphones or tablets.

**Follow-up care is a key part of your treatment and safety.** Be sure to make and go to all appointments, and call your doctor if you are having problems. It's also a good idea to know your test results and keep a list of the medicines you take.

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