

Speech Therapy

What is speech therapy?

If you are having problems with speaking, thinking, or other language skills, speech therapy is a treatment program that can help you. Speech therapists also help people with swallowing problems. Speech therapy helps people learn new ways to:

- Communicate
- Concentrate, remember, and process new information.
- Breathe or swallow

When is speech therapy used?

Speech therapy may be prescribed for conditions such as:

- A stroke
- Brain injury
- Feeling a lump in the throat due to an emotional or anxiety disorder (globus hystericus)
- Cancer or other growths on the vocal cords
- Chronic laryngitis (a hoarse voice, loss of voice, or sore throat that keeps coming back)
- Diseases such as multiple sclerosis, Alzheimer's disease, Parkinson's disease, or Lou Gehrig's disease
- Trouble swallowing (dysphagia)
- Speech disorders, like stuttering
- Vocal cords that are paralyzed or severely weakened after a viral infection of the throat, an injury, or surgery in the neck.

What happens during speech therapy?

A speech therapist will test you and find out the speech and language skills that you need to work on. Depending on the nature and severity of the problem, common treatments may include:

- Physical exercises--for example, of your mouth, tongue, or the muscles you use to swallow
- Practice and drilling
- Devices that can make it easier to communicate

The therapist may work with you one on one or in a small group. Speech therapists may also work closely with family members who are helping to care for you.

Types of exercises that may be used are:

- **Language exercises:** During these exercises the therapist may model the correct way to say words and have you repeat words and sentences.
- **Articulation exercises:** Articulation means the making of sounds. The therapist will do sound exercises with you by speaking the correct sound or syllable of a word for you to repeat. The therapist will show you how to make the sound with your mouth and tongue. You may use a mirror to watch how your mouth and tongue are moving.
- **Relaxation and breathing exercises:** Breathing techniques and relaxation exercises can help you relax your face and mouth muscles.

Speech therapy often is used along with physical therapy, occupational therapy, and assistive devices such as voice-synthesizing computers and language boards.

Where can I get speech therapy?

You can get these services as an outpatient of a hospital or skilled nursing facility, or from a home health agency, rehab agency, public health agency, or speech therapist in private practice. Check with your insurance company to see what kinds of services are covered by your insurance.

To find a speech therapist, call your local hospital, ask your primary care provider, or ask people you know for recommendations. To help choose a speech therapist, ask:

- Are you a licensed speech therapist in my state?
- How much experience do you have treating people with my condition?
- How often will I need to have speech therapy?
- What types of therapy do you think I need?

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