

Fact Sheet

Stuttering

What is stuttering?

Stuttering is a disorder that affects the fluency of speech. People who stutter know what they want to say, but have trouble saying it because the flow of their speech is disrupted by any of these behaviours:

- Repeating sounds, words or phrases (eg. I I I I I can do it).
- Prolonging sounds (eg. Where's my sssssister?).
- Blocking; moments where no sounds come out when the person is trying to speak.

People who stutter may also develop non-verbal movements associated with their stutter (eg. head movements, blinking, and facial grimacing).

Cause of Stuttering

- Stuttering can run in families. If a parent or relative stutters, a child has a higher chance of stuttering than someone whose parents or relatives do not.
- The exact cause of stuttering is unknown. It is thought that stuttering may be related to the brain functions that regulate speech production.
- Low intelligence, emotional problems and personality type are not a cause of stuttering.
- You cannot 'catch' a stutter by being around other children/people who stutter.

Facts about stuttering

- Most children begin stuttering between the ages of 2 and 5 years, when speech and language is developing.

- The onset of stuttering may be sudden or gradual.
- About 5% of children stutter at some stage. Many children go through a stage of stuttering as their speech and language develops. Research indicates that, of these children about half may recover naturally, but for others the stutter will persist.
- Stuttering is about 3 times more common in boys.
- Stuttering can vary in severity over time, and even throughout a day.
- Stuttering affects speakers of all languages and backgrounds.
- A child may stutter more when talking about a new topic or if using complicated language.

Most people who stutter are more fluent when speaking in unusual ways (e.g. singing, whispering, and reading aloud with someone).



Other factors can affect stuttering. For example, a child who is already stuttering may stutter more when excited, tired, arguing, given limited time to speak, competing to be heard, or speaking to someone new. Some children who stutter may feel anxious talking. They may avoid speaking in particular situations (eg. on the telephone), using certain words, or speaking with some people.



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When do I need to get help?

If your child starts stuttering, it is recommended that you put your child's name on a waiting list for a Speech Pathology assessment as soon as possible. While there is a chance that your child may recover naturally, it is not possible to predict which children will recover without therapy. Therefore, it is best to refer early as there may be a wait for Speech Pathology services. Research shows that stuttering therapy has better outcomes for preschoolers than it does for older people.

Where can I get help for my child?

Speech pathologists are trained to assess and treat stuttering. They are employed in community health centres, hospitals, and in private practice. Contact telephone numbers can be found in the white pages.

Stuttering treatment

Stuttering treatment aims to train the child to speak fluently and with confidence. Types of treatment vary according to the age of the child and the severity of their stutter.

The most common form of treatment for pre-school children who stutter is called the Lidcombe Program. This program is a very highly structured behaviourally based program that focuses on training parents/caregiver to treat stuttering. The children attend therapy once a week, and then practice intensively at home with their parents under the guidance of their Speech Pathologist with regular follow-ups. Parent involvement is

essential in the treatment of stuttering.



What should I do if my child stutters?

Do:

- Take time to listen to your child without distractions or competition from other family members. Listen to what your child is saying, not how it is being said (ie don't worry about the stutters).
- Let your child finish what they are saying, don't finish words or sentences for them.
- Repeat or rephrase what your child says to show that you have understood.
- Reassure your child if he or she is aware of the stutter and is concerned.
- Praise your child when he or she is fluent.
- Encourage your child to slow down and think about what they want to say.
- Have your child assessed by a Speech Pathologist.

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Don't:

- Draw attention to your child's speech in front of others or put him or her in situations where speech is on display.
- Interrupt your child's speech or complete sentences for him or her.
- Criticise your child's speech.
- Tease your child about their stutter.
- Let other people (ie friends, parents) make comments or try to correct your child's speech.

Where can I get more information?

For more information on stuttering, treatment and support organisations for people who stutter contact:

- **Stuttering Unit**
Bankstown Community Health Centre
Compass Centre, Level 4, 1
Fetherstone St, Bankstown
2200
Ph: 97802788
- **Communication Disorders Treatment & Research Clinic**
PO Box 170, Lidcombe 2007
Ph: 93519539
- **The Australian Stuttering Foundation**
C/o Faculty of Science,
University of Technology,
PO Box 123, Broadway 2007
Ph: 1300 362244

Remember

- Most children begin stuttering between the ages of 2 and 5 years, when speech and language is developing.
- About 5% of children stutter at some stage. For about 2% of these children, the stutter persists.
- Stuttering can run in families. If a parent stutters, the child has a higher chance of stuttering than someone whose parents did not stutter.
- Stuttering is 3 times more common in boys.
- While there is a good chance your child may recover naturally, speech therapy is very effective in treating stuttering in preschool aged children.
- Communicate and talk to your child as you would to a child without a stutter. Getting angry or annoyed when your child stutters will do more harm than good.

This fact sheet is for education purposes only.
Please consult with your doctor or other health professional
to make sure this information is right for your child.

This document was reviewed on Thursday, 3rd August 2006.

the
children's
hospital at Westmead

www.chw.edu.au

 **SYDNEY
CHILDREN'S
HOSPITAL**
RANDWICK

www.sch.edu.au


Kaleidoscope
HUNTER CHILDREN'S HEALTH NETWORK

www.kaleidoscope.org.au