

What is stuttering?

Stuttering is a speech disorder in which sounds, syllables, or words are repeated or prolonged, disrupting the normal flow of speech. These speech disruptions may be accompanied by struggling behaviors, such as rapid eye blinks or tremors of the lips. Stuttering can make it difficult to communicate with other people which often affects a person's quality of life.

Symptoms of stuttering can vary significantly throughout a person's day. In general, speaking before a group or talking on the telephone may make a person's stuttering more severe, while singing, reading, or speaking in unison may temporarily reduce stuttering.

Who stutters?

Roughly three million Americans stutter. Stuttering affects people of all ages. It occurs most often in children between the ages of 2 and 5 as they are developing their language skills. Approximately 5 percent of all children will stutter for some period in their life, lasting from a few weeks to several years. Boys are twice as likely to stutter as girls; as they get older, however, the number of boys who continue to stutter is three to four times larger than the number of girls. Most children outgrow stuttering. About 1 percent or less of adults stutter.

How is speech normally produced?

We make speech sounds through a series of precisely coordinated muscle movements involving breathing, phonation (voice production), and articulation (movement of the throat, palate, tongue, and lips). Muscle movements are controlled by the brain and monitored through our senses of hearing and touch.

What causes stuttering?

Although the precise mechanisms are not understood, there are two types of stuttering that are more common. (A third type of stuttering, called

psychogenic stuttering, can be caused by emotional trauma or problems with thought or reasoning. At one time, all stuttering was believed to be psychogenic, but today we know that psychogenic stuttering is rare.)

Developmental stuttering

Developmental stuttering occurs in young children while they are still learning speech and language skills. It is the most common form of stuttering. Some scientists and clinicians believe that developmental stuttering occurs when children's speech and language abilities are unable to meet the child's verbal demands. Developmental stuttering tends to run in families.

Neurogenic Stuttering

Neurogenic stuttering may occur after a stroke, head trauma, or other type of brain injury. With neurogenic stuttering, the brain has difficulty coordinating the different components involved in speaking because of signaling problems.

How is stuttering diagnosed?

Stuttering is usually diagnosed by a speech-language pathologist (SLP), a health professional who is trained to test and treat people with voice, speech, and language disorders. The speech-language pathologist will consider a variety of factors, including case history (such when the stuttering was first noticed and under what circumstances), an analysis of the stuttering behaviors, an evaluation of speech and/or language, if warranted, as well as a determination of the impact stuttering has on the person's life.