

# 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 or stretching out 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 brain activity that underlines speech production.
- Low intelligence, emotional problems, parenting style and personality type do not cause stuttering. Anxiety or stress can make stuttering worse.
- Stuttering is not contagious. 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 children start putting words together into short sentences.
- The onset of stuttering may be sudden or gradual.
- By 48 months of age 12.2% of children will have started to stutter. Of these children, 6.3% will recover naturally within 12 months of onset.
- In early childhood, stuttering is about 2 times more common in boys than girls.
- Stuttering can vary in severity over time, and even throughout the day.
- Stuttering affects speakers of all languages and backgrounds.
- Most people who stutter are more fluent when 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, nervous, arguing, given limited time to speak, competing to be heard, or using complicated language. Some children who stutter may also avoid speaking in particular situations (e.g. on the telephone), using certain words, or speaking with some people.

## 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

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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 or the Speech Pathology Australia website. Alternatively, if you are interested in research participation, you may consider contacting the Australian Stuttering Research Centre for more information on current projects.

## 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 best practice treatment for pre-school children who stutter is called the Lidcombe Program. This program is a behaviourally based intervention that trains parents/caregiver to treat stuttering at home. The children attend therapy once a week, and then practice

daily speech tasks at home with their parents. Parent involvement is essential in the Lidcombe Program.

## 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 (i.e. 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.
- Interact normally with your child. Don't make intrusive comments in an attempt to fix or treat the stutter. Comments like 'take a breath, slow down, etc' rarely help, and can make a child feel more self conscious.
- Have your child assessed by a Speech Pathologist.

### 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.

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- Criticise your child's speech.
- Tease your child about their stutter.
- Let other people (i.e. 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:

- **The Australian Stuttering Research Centre**  
The University of Sydney  
PO Box 170, Lidcombe NSW, 1825  
Ph: 9351 9061
- **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 they start putting words together into short sentences About 12.2% of children start to stutter at some stage. For about 6.3% of these children, the stutter naturally resolves within 12 months of onset..
- Stuttering can run in families. If a parent stutters, the child has a higher chance of stuttering than someone whose parents did not stutter.
- In early childhood, stuttering is 2 times more common in boys than girls.
- While there is a 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 7<sup>th</sup> May 2010.*

the  
children's  
hospital at Westmead

[www.chw.edu.au](http://www.chw.edu.au)

 **SYDNEY  
CHILDREN'S  
HOSPITAL  
RANDWICK**

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Kaleidoscope  
HUNTER CHILDREN'S HEALTH NETWORK

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