Stuttering

What do James Earl Jones, Marilyn Monroe, Bruce Willis and Sir Winston Churchill have in common? Answer: They all stutter.

What is Stuttering?

Stuttering is a speech disorder that may include some or all of the following:

- **multiple repetitions of whole words or parts of words (e.g., "my my my"; "my na-na-name");**
- **prolongations (stretching) of sounds (e.g., "mmmmmy");**
- **silent blocks (tense hesitations) where the person is trying to speak, but no sound comes out; and**
- **struggle behaviors, such as lip tremor or body movements, and avoidances of words or speaking situations.**

Stuttering presents a wide variety of both visible and hidden symptoms. It can be a multidimensional problem. Stuttering may involve speech behaviour, feelings, speech attitudes, self-concept, self-esteem and social interaction. Stuttering generally varies depending on the time and situation. It may come and go, particularly in young children.

Developmental Stuttering

Stuttering that begins in childhood, usually between the ages of 2½ and 5 years, is called developmental stuttering. It is not caused by parenting practices, a bad scare, or psychological trauma. Current research suggests that the speech system of people who stutter is more vulnerable to disruption than in those who do not. This is particularly true for those with a family history of stuttering. It is impossible to predict which children will recover or persist with stuttering into adulthood. Therefore, early intervention is recommended.

Acquired Stuttering

Stuttering that develops after a traumatic brain injury (e.g., from an accident or a stroke) is called acquired stuttering or neurogenic stuttering. Although neurogenic stuttering has similarities to developmental stuttering, there are some differences.

Treatment can help individuals of any age. They can learn to speak more smoothly and confidently. **Early intervention, particularly in the preschool years is important! Untreated stuttering may increase in severity and complexity over time.**

General Tips When Speaking With Someone Who Stutters

- Listen in the same manner and demeanour as you would with a typically fluent speaker.
- Listen patiently. Try not to finish what the person is saying.
- Listen to what the person is saying. Not how they are saying it.
- Do not suggest that the person slow down or start over. (It might help if **you** speak more calmly with a slightly reduced rate of speech).
- Attempt to create a relaxed environment, free of time pressure. Fast, hurried interactions generally create pressure to talk and react quickly. This can disrupt fluency.
- Do not interrupt older children or adults. Ask for clarification if the message is not understood. However, if a very young child is clearly caught in a moment of struggle that he or she finds frustrating, it might be appropriate to interrupt by saying, "Just a minute,". Then, move down to the child's eye level if possible. Structure the conversation by asking questions that require short answers. This can help the child relay the information he or she wants to impart.

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Additional Resources:

Other available resources include self-help and advocacy groups for people who stutter:

- The Institute for Stuttering Treatment and Research
- Canadian Stuttering Association
- The Stuttering Foundation
- National Stuttering Association
- Stuttering Home Page

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Getting Help

If you suspect a problem, consult a Registered Speech-Language Pathologist (R.SLP). To find a practitioner:

- Contact HEALTH LINK - Health Advice 24/7 at 8-1-1 or visit: www.MyHealth.Alberta.ca
- Enquire at a Public Health Centre or your child's school.
- Find a private practice SLP:
  - Search the Yellow Pages
  - Contact the Alberta Speech-Language Association of Private Practitioners (ASAPP) website at www.asapp.ca.