

## Acquired dysfluency

### What is it?

Dysfluency, stammering and stuttering are all ways to describe a fluency disorder in which a person has difficulty producing speech in a normal, smooth way.



For example, there may be lots of pauses, or words and sounds might be repeated several times, or may sound 'stretched out'. Sometimes, it may be hard for you to start off your words and sentences.

We can all have dysfluent speech at times however those with an acquired stammer may find their conversations can be interrupted and impacted by their speech.

In most cases, acquired stammering occurs in those who have not had a stammer in the past.

### “Neurogenic stammer”

You may have been told that you have a 'neurogenic' stammer. This means that your acquired fluency disorder has happened **after** damage to the brain or spinal cord. Some reasons for this are:

- Stroke
- Head injury
- Brain tumours or cysts
- Degenerative conditions, such as Parkinson's disease or multiple sclerosis
- Other conditions that affect the brain, e.g. meningitis and Guillain-Barré Syndrome
- Drug-related causes such as side-effects of some medications



## What does it look like?

Because it can occur due to many different neurological reasons, it can look different in everybody. Some common characteristics are:



- ❖ Word repetitions (e.g. but but but), sound or syllable repetitions (e.g. C-c-c-c-can I?), prolonging sounds (e.g. wiiiiiiiiill we) or blocking sounds (mouth is in position but no sound comes out). A mixture of some or all of these can occur.
- ❖ Dysfluencies can occur anywhere in the word (e.g. the beginning, middle or end). This is different to developmental stammering where dysfluencies occur at the beginning of the word.
- ❖ Speaker can be annoyed but not anxious about their stammer.
- ❖ There is no difference across a variety of talking activities (speech tasks), e.g. talking with friends, reading aloud.
- ❖ Secondary symptoms that are common in developmental stammering are almost absent, e.g. avoiding specific sounds and words if you know you are going to stammer on them, tension around the jaw.

## What can I do?

- ✓ Stay **relaxed**.
- ✓ Take a **deep breath** before starting a sentence.
- ✓ **Slow** down my speech if I talk quickly.
- ✓ **Acknowledge the breakdown** and that you both share responsibility, it's no one's fault.
- ✓ Do **not be discouraged**.
- ✓ **Reduce distractions** in the room when having a conversation (e.g. turn off the TV)
- ✓ Keep your sense of **humour**.



## What can the people around me do to help?

- ✓ Give me **time**
- ✓ **Don't finish my sentence** for me, I know what I want to say and I will get there eventually
- ✓ Be responsive and **listen carefully**.
- ✓ Keep **eye contact** with me when I'm talking to you.
- ✓ Focus on the **content** of what I am saying and not my stammer.
- ✓ Understand that a stammer on its own does **not affect my intelligence**.

