

# Tips for Achieving Stronger Communication Skills



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# Articulation Disorders

An articulation disorder is defined as trouble pronouncing certain sounds. Articulation disorders can affect both adults and children.

There are many reasons that someone may experience a problem with articulation.

Research shows that articulation disorders may be related to hearing loss, cleft palate, developmental disorders, or even dental issues. It can also be associated with a problem of the nerves that control the movement of the tongue or brain injury. Often the cause is unknown.



Speech therapy is the best way to correct an articulation problem. A speech therapist can evaluate your speech and recommend the best course of treatment to correct the problem.

## 3 Common Articulation Errors

### Problem Sounds

1. The 'R' sound
2. Lisp on the 'S' or 'Z' sound
3. The 'Th' Sound

### Possible Trouble Words

1. Road, Father, Bird
2. Success, Surprise, Glasses
3. Think, Path, Birthday

# Achieving Clearer Speech

## Is Articulation Therapy Effective for Adults?



Articulation therapy is effective for adults. Speech-language pathologists find that adults often respond quicker than children with articulation therapy.

There are several reasons for this: 1) Adults tend to be more motivated to improve their articulation, 2) Adults tend to follow the speech therapist's instructions easier than children, and 3) Adults are more likely to practice in-between visits with their speech pathologist.

A comprehensive assessment of your speech sounds is an excellent place to get started. Your speech pathologist will listen carefully to your speech, and then they will use their expertise to create goals specific to your needs.

Although speech therapy is vital in correcting articulation problems, here are some ways to improve your articulation skills outside of treatment.

## Tips To Improve Your Speech

### Warm-Up

First, identify some words that contain your targeted sound that you produce all of the time correctly. Practice these words as a warm-up before your session.

### Repetition

You need to repeat the same sound accurately to learn to produce it consistently. Practice your targeted sound 5-10 minutes/day. This approach is vital in helping to make the sound correctly.

### Use a mirror

Practice saying your sound in front of a mirror and carefully watch the placement of your tongue. Follow your speech pathologist's instructions for tongue placement. Also, try to feel where your tongue is placed within your mouth to produce your target sound accurately

# Stuttering

**Stuttering is when the natural flow of speech is interrupted.**

**It can be characterized by repetitions of words, syllables, sounds, prolongations (drawing out a sound), or abnormal stoppages (no sound). In a broader sense, stuttering is a disfluency and sometimes referred to as stammering.**

**Stuttering is likely genetic, may be tied to stress and anxiety, and can develop at any age. The causes for adult onset of stuttering are not always known, but genetic factors and brain injury could be contributors.**

**To diagnose stuttering, you will want to seek an evaluation from a qualified and experienced speech pathologist with expertise in treating individuals who stutter.**

**Although there is no simple cure for stuttering, individuals who stutter can learn to speak more confidently and clearly with speech therapy.**



## When to Seek Help

There are several signs that you should look for when deciding whether or not to get a speech evaluation.

- If the stutter begins after an acute episode.
- If your stuttering causes you anxiety or other emotional difficulties, such as fear or avoidance of speaking situations.
- If you aren't able to manage your stutter on your own and it impacts your quality of life.

# Improving Fluency

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## Tips For Adults Who Stutter

### Reduce Speaking Rate

If you find yourself in a situation where you talk quickly, remember to slow down to see if the stutter gets any better. It may help to do a series of drills where you work on speaking slowly and in a controlled way.

### Pause and Phrase

The simple act of pausing before saying the next word can be used as an opportunity to plan or to regroup and allow the stuttering moment and related tension to pass. You can practice this technique while reading aloud, pausing every few words.

### Reduce Tension

There are many benefits to meditation and deep breathing. It clears the mind and reduces stress. For some people, becoming more relaxed can also help boost confidence. Improved confidence may allow a person to speak with more fluent speech.



**Stuttering may make you feel frustrated and overwhelmed at times as an adult. Our speech-language pathologists offer customized therapy to help you become a more confident communicator.**

# What Is Aphasia?

Aphasia is a language disorder that affects a person's ability to communicate. It typically occurs following a stroke or brain injury, but it can also happen due to a slow-growing brain tumor or other neurologic diseases.

Aphasia affects a person's ability to speak or understand spoken language. It can also affect a person's reading and writing.

Depending on which brain areas are affected, aphasia might present with varying degrees of severity. Recovery from aphasia can occur over months and years.

Intensive intervention performed soon after a brain injury has occurred is key to achieving positive outcomes in speech therapy; however, treatment can be effective at any time.

Those who seek aphasia therapy do so because they have difficulty speaking or understanding.



Often the individual with aphasia reports that the aphasia is a barrier to life participation. Some individuals with aphasia have feelings of self-consciousness, reduced confidence, and loss of autonomy.

If the individual has trouble re-engaging or participating in life, then aphasia therapy can help.

Aphasia treatment activities should be highly individualized to help the person with aphasia develop the skills needed to participate in life.

# Communicating With a Person With Aphasia

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## 1 Keep It Simple

Providing too many choices can be stressful. You can make it easier for the person with aphasia to understand if you offer just two options instead. Also, choosing simple words can support more effective communication.



## 2 Minimize Distractions

Reduce background noises and distractions such as a television, or close a door to a loud hallway to allow the person to focus.



## 3 Use Visuals

Use paper and a pen to write down essential phrases or draw pictures or diagrams to explain your point and make it easier for the person with aphasia to understand the meaning of your message.



## 4 Provide Support

If the person with aphasia is having difficulty naming the correct term, help them by telling them to describe the word, picture it, or think of the sound it begins with. You can also ask them to write the word, use gestures to describe the word, or point to an object associated with the word.



## 5 Be Patient

Allow the person with aphasia time to respond after you've spoken. If someone with aphasia feels rushed or pressured to talk, they may become nervous, which might affect their ability to communicate.



# Voice Disorders

## What Is a Voice Disorder?

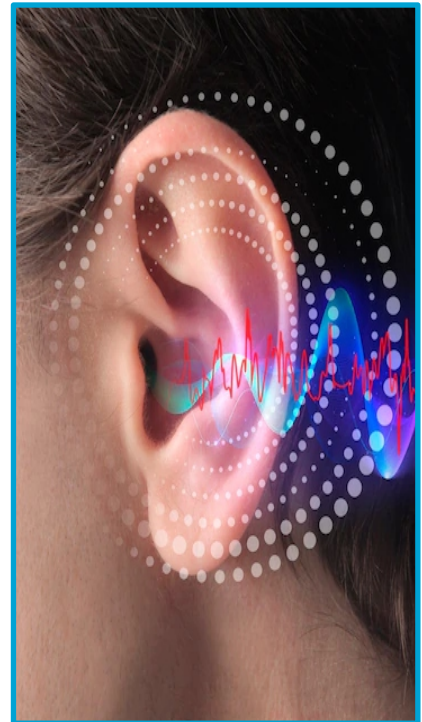
An estimated 17.9 million adults in the U.S. report having had a problem with their voice within the past 12 months. A voice disorder is a problem with the loudness or quality of a person's voice. A voice can be too quiet, too loud, or hoarse and breathy.

If you have a voice disorder, your voice may sound:

**Rough or harsh Strained**

**Weak or whispery**

**Too high or low in pitch**



## What Causes a Voice Disorder?

### Abusing or Misusing Your Voice

Excessive screaming and shouting or talking over background noise for extended periods can damage the vocal folds. These behaviors can cause growths to form and alter how the voice sounds.

### Nervous System Diseases

Problems such as Parkinson disease Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), Stroke brain injury, tumors, multiple sclerosis (MS), and myasthenia gravis (MG) can impact the nerves of the vocal folds causing voice changes.

### Bumps, Blisters, and Growths

Extra tissue/growths such as nodules, polyps, cysts, or papilloma can form on the surfaces or edges of the vocal folds. This stops the vocal folds from touching together smoothly, which can change the sound of the voice. There are many causes of growth in the vocal folds. Some may include illness injury, cancer, and vocal abuse.

### Irritants

Vocal fold inflammation and swelling can come from irritants such as gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD), allergies, drinking alcohol, smoking, and vocal abuse/overuse. The irritation and swelling can cause unwanted vocal changes.



# Promoting Vocal Health

## What is Vocal Hygiene?

Many people use their voices professionally. Singers, teachers, doctors, lawyers, nurses, salespeople, consultants, public speakers, and athletes are among the few who use their voices extensively.

It is also known that people on the phone or videoconference talk more than four times as loud as they do during in-person conversations, putting people who teleconference at risk for developing voice problems.

Vocal hygiene is a term used to describe good habits that can support a healthy and strong voice throughout your life. Here's how you can get started today:

- **Maintain good hydration.** Drink 6-8 cups of water per day and minimize caffeine intake.
- **Take frequent voice breaks.** Your voice needs 15 minutes of rest for every hour it is used.
- **Avoid smoking, alcohol, and exposure to secondhand smoke.**
- **Instead of cheering, yelling, screaming, or shouting, use whistles, horns, or clap, to show excitement or touch someone's arm to get their attention.**
- **Avoid clearing your throat or coughing.** Take a dry swallow or a sip of water instead.
- **If you like to sing, you should know your singing limitations and stay within them, avoiding strain or stress or using a pressed voice when singing.**
- **Excessive throat clearing and coughing can be harmful to the voice box (also known as the larynx) and should be avoided.**
- **When speaking on the phone or via remote videoconference, you should maintain good speaking posture by sitting straight up and keeping your head facing straight ahead.**



# Getting Professional Help

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Experts in communication studies have compiled the information presented in this e-book.

The aim is to provide you with easy-to-apply techniques that you can use to improve your communication skills. Remember, these solutions are not one-size-fits-all, as you will need to find what works best for you and your unique situation.

One important thing to remember when working on your communication skills is that change does not happen overnight. It takes time, patience, and practice to see results.

Be sure to allow yourself to make mistakes and learn from them. And above all, have fun with it!

If you are looking for more information on communication problems or want to learn more about our programs, set up a complimentary phone consultation with us on our web site [www.virtelco.com](http://www.virtelco.com).

