



A guide to...

Verbal Apraxia *Patient Information*

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What is Verbal Apraxia?

Verbal apraxia is a motor speech disorder that makes it hard to pronounce words correctly and consistently. Other terms used which mean the same include, 'Dyspraxia' and 'Apraxia'.

The difficulty is not due to the weakness or paralysis of the speech muscles (e.g. lips, cheek, tongue), but due to brain damage. The brain damage causes the messages to not get through correctly to tell muscles how and when to move to make the correct sounds.

This speech disorder may result from a stroke, head injury, tumour or other illness.

This acquired motor speech disorder may occur in isolation or may coincide with other difficulties e.g.

- Dysarthria (muscle weakness affecting the clarity of speech production)
- Dysphasia (language difficulties affecting comprehension and expressive abilities).

How does it affect my speech?

If you have Verbal Apraxia you may experience some of the difficulties mentioned below:

- Inconsistent errors where you can say a word once however when repeating it again, it is incorrect. You may add sounds, miss out sounds or make up a different word.
- Difficulty initiating the words that you want to say. You are unable to co-ordinate your lips and tongue in the correct way to produce the target sounds and in turn say the right words. This is known as **groping**.
- You are able to say certain words/ phrases with no difficulty e.g. basic greetings, counting and days of the week. This is known as **automatic speech**.
- The intonation and pace of the words may sound different.
- You are aware of your difficulties and may become very frustrated as you know what you want to say however it does not come out in the correct way.
- In severe cases, you may have difficulty producing any sounds at all.

What can be done?

Your Speech and Language Therapist will work with you in assessing your speech and communication difficulties to identify a therapy programme tailored to your needs.

In addition, they may provide you with strategies and alternative augmentative communication (AAC) resources to support e.g. picture charts when trying to communicate.

Therapy input may include a lot of repetition of sounds and retraining your muscles to move in the right way to produce sounds in the correct way. This may be boring and frustrating however support and encouragement from family and friends is important.

What can my relatives, carers and friends do to help?

Here are some suggestions:

- Practise automatic speech (counting, days of the week, months of the year).
- Singing familiar songs e.g. nursery rhymes.
- Ensure the environment is as quiet as possible, reducing any background noise when the person is trying to talk to you.
- Be patient and give the person time to try and get their message across. Do not interrupt them!
- Encouraging and using alternative ways to communicate e.g. gesture, drawing, and writing.

If you would like to discuss the information in this leaflet further, please speak to your speech and language therapist.