



YOU CAN: SPEAK More Clearly

Difficulty with speech (dysarthria) may occur in approximately 40% of people with MS. Problems are typically mild to moderate, and may interfere with how easily a person's speech can be heard and understood.

Common speech problems for those with MS follow:

- Reduced loudness may be due to poor breath support/control.
- Imprecise articulation may be due to weakness, slowness, or incoordination of the lips, tongue, and soft palate.
- Flow of speech may be slow, have irregular pauses, or excess and equal emphasis due to poor timing of respiration and articulation.
- Voice quality may be harsh or hypernasal if there is neuromuscular involvement of the soft palate or vocal folds.

A speech language pathologist (SLP) can evaluate specific speech/voice problems and recommend treatment. The primary goals are to improve intelligibility and naturalness of speech with communication partners.

You can speak more clearly by using the following strategies:

- 1) **Fill Your Lungs Fully:** Use your diaphragm.
- 2) **Speak Louder:** Push out with extra effort.
- 3) **Slow Down:** Allow extra time for your lip and tongue movements.
- 4) **Exaggerate Articulation:** Make precise contacts with your lips and tongue to reduce slurring.
- 5) **Pause strategically:** Every few words, to allow for better breath support, loudness, and articulation.
- 6) **Actively Self Evaluate:** Watch for feedback from the listener, and correct your speech if it appears not to be understood.

At times specialized equipment may be recommended, such as:

- Voice amplifier (with headset microphone) when adequately increasing loudness is too difficult.
- Speech generating devices (although a rare need) when speech is severely to profoundly unintelligible. Program the buttons, and it talks for you.