

# Insights

## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ABOUT STUTTERING



### **Q. What is stuttering?**

A. Stuttering is the condition in which the flow of speech is broken by abnormal stoppages (no sound), repetitions (st-st-stuttering), or prolongations (sssssstuttering) of sounds and syllables. There may also be unusual facial and body movements associated with the effort to speak.

### **Q. Aren't all people nonfluent to some extent?**

A. Yes. Almost all children go through a stage of frequent nonfluency in early speech development. Adults may interject syllables ("uh") and occasionally repeat words, phrases, and sounds, but these nonfluencies are accepted as normal and usually are not a cause for concern.

### **Q. Does stammering mean the same thing as stuttering?**

A. Most people use the terms interchangeably.

### **Q. What causes stuttering?**

A. We still do not know what causes stuttering. It may have different causes in different people, or it may occur only when a combination of factors comes together. It is also possible that what causes stuttering is different from what makes it continue or get worse. Possible influences include incoordination of the speech muscles, rate of language development, the way parents and others talk to the child, and other forms of communication and life stress.

### **Q. Is stuttering caused by emotional or psychological problems?**

A. Children who stutter are no more likely to have psychological problems than children who do not stutter. There is no evidence that emotional trauma causes stuttering.

### **Q. At what age is stuttering likely to appear?**

A. Stuttering typically begins between 2 and 5 years of age, but occasionally begins in a school-age child and, more rarely, in an adult.

### **Q. If I think my child is beginning to stutter, should I wait or seek help?**

A. You should seek a professional evaluation. Most children outgrow their nonfluency, but others will not. The problem of stuttering may be prevented from developing if treated early enough.

### **Q. Once stuttering has developed, can it be treated?**

A. Yes. There are a variety of successful approaches for treating both children and adults.

### **Q. Can stuttering be "cured"?**

A. Stuttering is not a disease. Rather than thinking in terms of an absolute "cure" for stuttering, the goal should be to progress toward improved fluency and success in communicating.

### **Q. What should I do when I hear a child speaking nonfluently?**

A. Children may be unaware that they are speaking nonfluently. Do not call attention to the nonfluent speech pattern or allow others to do so.

Do not say, "Stop and start over," "Think before you talk," "Talk slower," or "Cat got your tongue?" Listen patiently and carefully to what the child is saying, and do not focus on how it is being said.

### **Q. What should I do when I hear an adult stuttering?**

A. Adults who stutter need the same patience and attention to their ideas as speakers who don't stutter. Don't look away, and don't hurry them or fill in words. This attempt to help can create anxiety and self-consciousness and make the problem worse.