

Is there anything that can be done at home to help someone who stutters?

Your speech-language pathologist will have specific suggestions for you at the time of the assessment, but for family members and parents, it may be helpful to:

- reduce competition for speaking time and encourage turn taking
- slow down your speaking rate
- maintain eye contact and be a good listener

Suggestions for home strategies are not a substitute for therapy.

For more information about stuttering, stuttering treatment and ISTAR, visit istar.ualberta.ca.

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Stuttering Information



istar.ualberta.ca

Imagine you are unable to order your favourite food, express your feelings or say what you want because of your speech.

ISTAR can help with that.

ISTAR, founded in 1986 with the help of generous donors, is an institute of the Faculty of Rehabilitation Medicine at the University of Alberta that offers specialized treatment to children, teens and adults who stutter and/or have communication challenges.

It is estimated that over 300,000 Canadians are affected by stuttering. But we can help. Treatment is available to help them deal with both the physical and emotional aspects of their speech problem.

Stuttering...

- affects both children and adults
- may have a genetic and hereditary component
- usually begins between the ages of two and five, when speech and language are rapidly developing
- may begin gradually or suddenly
- affects more males than females
- may increase with excitement, fatigue, feeling rushed to talk or expressing a long or complex thought
- may come and go
- may change unpredictably in frequency and severity

What causes stuttering?

There may be many different factors that contribute to a child developing a stutter during development, including a complex interaction between the physical make-up of the child and the environment.

One important fact to remember is that stuttering is not caused by nervousness nor is it related to personality or intellectual capabilities.

Adult onset stuttering can also occur due to various neurological or psychological reasons. Speech therapy for these clients is tailored to meet a client's individual needs.

Is it stuttering?

It is sometimes difficult to differentiate stuttering from normal disfluency (e.g., repetitions and pauses that are related to formulating thoughts into language). If you suspect a stutter, contact ISTAR to have a certified speech-language pathologist conduct a speech assessment.

Some of the signs of **normal disfluency** are:

- one or two repetitions of whole words (e.g., “We, we went to the circus”)
- revisions (e.g., “I want a cracker. I mean a cookie”)
- interjections (e.g., “Um”)
- less than 10 disfluencies per 100 words

Some signs of **stuttering** are:

- more than two repetitions of whole words (e.g., “But, but, but, but”)
- repetitions of parts of words (e.g., “Be-be-because”)
- prolongation or stretching of sounds (e.g., “Sssssso”)
- silent blocks (getting stuck on a word or tense hesitations)
- more than 10 disfluencies per 100 words

Please note: *not all of these behaviours need to be present for stuttering to be diagnosed.*



What does treatment involve?

First, an individual is assessed by a certified speech-language pathologist. For children, the consultation process includes a parent interview, conversational samples, screening for other speech and language difficulties, and an evaluation of the child's responses to speaking under normal pressures and to various therapy techniques. Young children are assessed through an enjoyable play format which does not draw negative attention to their speech. For adults and teens, consultation includes an evaluation of speech and communication skills in order to identify the treatment program that best suits the individual.

Once the assessment is completed and a stutter has been identified, a weekly or daily treatment plan will be developed. This plan is designed to meet the needs of the client based on age, severity and impact of stuttering on the individual. For children, parents will also be a part of the process, as they will be taught how to strengthen existing fluency.

A family-based approach is used with school-age children and pre-schoolers, focusing on strategies to develop the child's and parents' ability to manage fluency in the long term. We emphasize early intervention for preschoolers. Although some children who begin to stutter do recover without formal treatment, there is no guarantee that this will occur. Therefore, it is important to monitor stuttering from an early age.

Some treatment approaches used at ISTAR are:

- response contingent or behavioural
- fluency skills training
- stuttering modification
- effective communication skills
- cognitive-behavioural skills
- a combination of the approaches listed above

Type of therapy ranges from individual to small group, intensive (3-4 week programs) and extended (weekly programs). Long distance assessments and therapy are also available.