Dysarthria

What Is Dysarthria?
Dysarthria is a type of speech disorder that can affect breathing, and your ability to form sounds, produce voice, as well as the rhythm and nasality of your speech and voice. The muscles used for speech (tongue, lips, soft palate, jaw, muscles of breath support) become disordered causing speech to sound slow, slurred, quiet, and/or less coordinated. A person with dysarthria may demonstrate one or more of the following characteristics:

- Slurred Speech (mumbling; person may sound “intoxicated;”)
- Impaired rate of speech (too fast or slow).
- Impaired loudness (too quiet; voice may trail off at the end of a sentence).
- Disordered breathing (running out of breath when speaking; reduced breath support may impact loudness of speech).
- Disturbed resonance (speech can sound nasal or like a patient has a cold).

What Causes Dysarthria?
Some of the causes for Dysarthria include:
- Stroke.
- Brain Injury.
- Neurological diseases (i.e. Parkinson’s, Lou Gehrig’s disease).
- Injuries to specific nerves or muscle groups as a result of accidents or surgical procedures.
- Drug overdose, suffocation or other damage to the brain and spinal cord.

What Does A Speech Pathologist Do?

Evaluation:
A Speech Pathologist will use tests, observation, and/or activities to determine a patient’s strengths and weakness as they relate to:

- Precision of speech.
- Strength, movement, coordination and symmetry of the muscles used for speech.
- Vocal quality.
- Coordination of breathing, speaking and breath support.

Therapy:
A Speech Pathologist will design and carry out a treatment program based on the person’s individual needs. This may include:

- **Exercise Program:** Exercises will be taught to improve muscular strength and coordination. Stretching may be used to increase the movement of muscles. Massaging with ice may be used to stimulate muscle movement.
- **Compensation:** Compensatory strategies can be used to increase successful communication.
- **Education and Training**: Providing education to the patient and family about exercises, strategies and methods to promote successful communication.

**How To Help A Person With Dysarthria?**

There are several things family and friends can do to help their loved one communicate more effectively. The first and most important thing is to encourage the person to practice the exercises and techniques provided by the Speech Pathologist. Scheduling time throughout the day and getting into a routine will help a person stay committed to the exercise program. Family and friends can also help by reminding their loved one to use strategies to help others understand them better.

Some strategies may include:
- Look at one another when talking.
- Create a quiet environment for communicating (turn off the TV, close the door).
- Sit up straight and take a deep breath (from your stomach) before speaking.
- Talk louder.
- Speak slower.
- Carefully pronounce words (exaggerate your speech; open your mouth wider).
- Make a specific space between words so they do not run together.
- Take pauses between every few words when conversing.
- Use shorter sentences.