

# COMMUNICATING WITH A PERSON WHO HAS DYSARTHRIA

## WHAT IS DYSARTHRIA?

Dysarthria is a motor speech disorder that can cause difficulty speaking. It can be present from birth or be acquired following a stroke, diagnosis of Parkinson's disease or can be associated with other medical conditions. People with Dysarthria often feel stiffness, weakness or incoordination of the muscles required for speaking. This may lead to 'slurred' speech which can be challenging for others to understand. People with Dysarthria can also experience the following:

- Reduced facial expressions.
- Reduced pitch i.e. a monotonous voice.
- Difficulty controlling volume or rate of speech.
- Difficulties coordinating breathing and speaking.

## HELPFUL STRATEGIES TO ASSIST A PERSON WITH DYSARTHRIA TO COMMUNICATE

- **Reduce background noise and distractions** when the person is speaking e.g. turn off TV or radio. Give the person your full attention.
- Give the person plenty of **time** to speak. Ensure they do not feel rushed.
- If you did not understand the person, don't pretend like you heard! **Be honest** and ask them to say their message again.
- Ask **clarifying questions** if you are unsure e.g. "Did you ask me if...?".
- **Assistive devices** like communication boards can be used to assist the person to communicate. You can find examples of communication/letter boards on our website: [nutricia.ie](http://nutricia.ie).
- **Phones/tablets** may also be used as communication aids e.g. download visual aid apps or simply take photographs of frequently used items which the person can refer to if they are having difficulty being understood.
- Encourage the person to **speak slowly and loudly**. They may need to **over emphasise** or exaggerate words, in particular longer words e.g. "com-pu-ter".
- Using **shorter phrases** can be helpful. Use slightly prolonged spaces between words so the listener can differentiate words.
- Encourage the person to use **non-verbal means of communication** as much as possible e.g. pointing, gestures, writing, typing on their phone.
- Being consciously aware of breathing while speaking can help increase vocal volume i.e. **take a deep breath** and concentrate on speaking on outward breath.



Please visit [isti.ie](http://isti.ie) to locate a Speech and Language Therapist near you.

You can also visit [nutricia.ie](http://nutricia.ie), email [nutriciacare@nutricia.com](mailto:nutriciacare@nutricia.com) or Freephone 1800 923 404 for more information.

