

That Speech Lady: Information for Adults Who Stammer



Hello. I hope this guide provides a helpful starting point for you. Stammering is a natural variation in how people communicate. It doesn't reflect your intelligence or what you want to say, it's simply a different way of speaking.

Over the years, our understanding of stammering and how to best support people who stammer has evolved significantly. My goal is to share some of the latest evidence and guidance to help you feel more confident and informed.

⚠ Disclaimer: This resource is designed to provide helpful information for adults who stammer. It is not a substitute for professional speech and language therapy. Every person has unique needs, and personalised assessments and guidance from a qualified speech and language therapist are essential to support you fully.

The strategies and advice offered here are general guidelines and may not suit every person's situation. Some content may refer to external websites or materials; please check these sources for relevance and accuracy, as they may change over time.

If you have specific concerns or would like more tailored advice, please reach out to a qualified speech and language therapist. Please note that use of this information is at your own discretion and risk.

What is Stammering?

Stammering, also known as stuttering, is a unique way some people speak. It's important to understand that there is no single, universally agreed-upon definition of stammering. Historically, it was often viewed through a medical lens and labelled as a "disorder" that needed fixing. Perspectives are now shifting, and stammering is increasingly recognised as simply a different way of speaking, not something that must be corrected.

People who stammer report stammering feels like a loss of control. They know what they want to say, but they have trouble saying what they want, when they want.



When a person stammers, you may notice some of the following:

- **Repetitions:** Repeating sounds, syllables, or words (e.g., "My name is A-A-A-A-Amir").
- **Prolongations:** Stretching or extending sounds (e.g., "On Sssssssaturday I play tennis").
- **Blocks:** Pausing before or during speech, where it seems like the sound is "stuck" (e.g., a pause before saying "-----Can you pass the butter please?").

These speech patterns can happen at any point in a sentence and may last for varying amounts of time, from a brief moment to several seconds. You may also notice other movements in a person's body such as eye blinking, head nodding or hand and foot tapping.

It's important to know that stammering isn't just the physical aspects of speech. It also involves how a person feels about their speech, how others respond to it and how they manage their stammer in daily life. For some people, stammering isn't a problem. For others, it can be more challenging. Some people may try to appear fluent by hiding or avoiding their stammer. This is called covert stammering. It happens when someone changes their words or how they speak to avoid stammering, and it can be mentally and emotionally exhausting.



How Common Is It?

- Stammering can affect anyone, regardless of ethnicity, gender, personality, intelligence, wealth or education.
- Between 5-8% of children will start stammering at some point.
- Around 1% of people worldwide stammer, which is over 80 million people (Yairi & Ambrose, 2013).
- In the UK, approximately 700,000 people stammer.
- Approximately 75% of adults who stammer are men (Bloodstein, 1995).
- Not every person who stammers will require speech and language therapy.



What Causes It?

Stammering can begin in childhood or adulthood. When stammering begins during adulthood, it's called acquired or adult-onset stammering. Understanding what might have caused your stammering can be complex, as each person's experience is unique. Research shows that different causes can lead to very similar stammering patterns, so the cause often can't be determined from the stammering itself (Howells and Packer, 2023).

Typically, the causes of adulthood stammering fall into one of these categories:



1. Neurological Changes

Stammering may develop following changes to brain structure or function, such as stroke, head injury, brain tumours, neurological conditions such as Parkinson's or Multiple Sclerosis, epilepsy, Long COVID, encephalitis, or side effects from medications.

2. Functional Neurological Conditions

Sometimes stammering develops in connection with psychological trauma, prolonged stress or mental health difficulties. This may appear suddenly after a traumatic event or gradually during periods of high stress. These are real neurological symptoms, not imagined difficulties.

3. Return of a Childhood Stammer

Some adults experience a return of a stammer they had in childhood. This can re-emerge during times of stress, significant life changes or sometimes without a clear reason. Since childhood stammering is typically neurological in nature (linked to differences in how the brain processes speech) the same underlying factors may be contributing again.

4. Emerging Research: Infections

Recent studies suggest infections like streptococcal (strep) throat infections might be linked to stammering onset in children. While not yet confirmed in adults, this highlights the complexity of stammering causes (STAMMA, 2025).

5. Unknown Causes

In some cases, no clear cause can be identified.

? When Should I Be Concerned?

It can be difficult to know when you may need support, especially as stammering can be variable. Accessing support now may help you feel more confident and supported, regardless of what happens to your stammer. If any of the following signs apply, it may be helpful to contact a speech and language therapist:

1. Impact on Daily Life

Communication Difficulties: Your stammer is making it difficult for you to express yourself. Effective communication is important. Speech and language therapy can help you build confidence in your communication and ability to express yourself.



Avoiding Speaking Situations: You avoid situations where you have to speak, such as work presentations, group projects or social gatherings. Support can help boost your confidence and encourage you to participate more comfortably.

2. Thoughts and Feelings

Frustration or Anxiety: Your stammer makes you feel anxious, frustrated or upset. Therapy can support your emotional well-being and provide healthy ways to manage these feelings.

Negative Self-Talk: You have negative thoughts towards your speech. For example, “There’s no point talking now” or “I’m going to stammer and everyone will laugh”. Seeking support can help you process and navigate these thoughts and feelings.

3. Feedback from Others

Comments from Others: Other people make comments that bother you, or you are experiencing bullying or teasing because of your speech. Sharing your story and knowing what options are available can be extremely valuable.

4. Tension and Struggle

Struggle vs. Stammering: You experience physical tension or struggle during moments of stammering. You may try to hide your stammer or you avoid speaking altogether because of fear or anxiety. Whilst stammering isn’t something that needs “fixing”, therapy can support you to reduce physical tension, struggle and avoidance behaviours, although we may not work on this immediately.

5. Family or Friend Concerns

Feeling Unsure About How to Help: Your friends and family may feel uncertain about what to say or do to support you. They may feel worried about giving you the wrong advice or not knowing the most up-to-date guidance. Having clear, evidence-based information can make a big difference. Having a network of trusted people you can talk to about your stammer can really help.

6. Gut Feeling

Trust Your Instincts: If you have a gut feeling you might need some support, trust that instinct, it’s often right. Even if you’re unsure, reaching out for advice can be a great first step. Speech and language therapists are there to help you figure out what you need, whether it’s a little guidance or more in-depth support.

How Can I Help Myself?



Stay Informed: Approaches to stammering support has evolved over time. Some of the strategies and techniques we used to teach are now out dated and some people have told us they were harmful. There is no cure for stammering, and there is no single strategy or technique that guarantees fluency. It's important to know that every person who stammers has the right to manage their stammer in the way they wish to. At That Speech Lady, we focus on helping people to speak comfortably and authentically, to self-advocate, to explore thoughts, feelings and acceptance and ways to reduce any physical tension and avoidance behaviours.

Find Role Models: Look into stories of well-known people who stammer, such as Ed Sheeran or Gareth Gates; their experiences may inspire you. You can also check out the Stambassadors program from Action for Stammering Children for real-life stories and advice from adults who stammer:

<https://actionforstammeringchildren.org/stambassadors/>.

Celebrate your Strengths: Your worth is not defined by your speech. Embrace the qualities that make you unique, whether it's your creativity, humour, athleticism or problem-solving skills.

One Day at a Time: Be kind to yourself, especially on tough days. It's okay to have moments when speaking feels challenging.

Consider what Helps: You may find it helpful to think about what makes speaking easier for you. Would telling others about your stammer make a difference? Are there situations where you feel more relaxed talking? Experiment with small changes to see what works for you. Stamma has lots of resources that could help: <https://stamma.org/get-help/for-your-stammer>

Explore Stammering Pride: There is a growing community that celebrates stammering. Whether you choose to embrace it or not, there's no right or wrong approach. Here are some websites you might like to explore: <https://www.stutteringcommons.org/> and <https://dysfluent.org/>.

How Can Speech and Language Therapy Help?

At That Speech Lady, therapy is tailored to your needs. We combine evidence-based approaches with specialist knowledge in stammering. Together, we will find out what approaches and strategies work best for you. Therapy may include:

- Understanding stammering and how it impacts you
- Building confidence and self-advocacy skills



- Reducing barriers to communication
- Learning strategies to make speaking feel easier and more comfortable
- Strengthening communication skills
- Reflecting on thoughts and feelings about stammering
- Embracing and accepting your stammer as part of who you are

This approach can empower you to communicate with confidence, express yourself authentically and feel positive about how you speak.

What If I Need More Support?

If you would like to stay connected, you can join my email list here: <https://thatspeechlady.co.uk/page/email>

You are very welcome to contact me through my website <https://www.thatspeechlady.co.uk> or send me an email: lauren@thatspeechlady.co.uk I specialise in stammering and offer independent speech and language therapy in my local area (Southwater, Horsham, West Sussex) and online sessions for those who live further away.

You can also contact your local National Health Service (NHS) and refer yourself to Speech and Language Therapy (there is no charge for this service). You can also find other independent speech and language therapists via the Association of Speech and Language Therapists in Independent Practice (ASLTIP): <https://asltip.com/find-a-speech-therapist/>

What Other Resources Do You Recommend?

There are lots of great resources full of insights, inspiration and information about stammering. Here are some of my favourites:

Websites

Supporting people who stammer of all ages <https://stamma.org>

Support for university students and staff who stammer <https://www.stuc-uk.org/>

Support people who stammer at work <https://www.50millionvoices.org/>

Comics created by an adult who stammers <http://stutteringiscool.com/>

Celebrating stammering voices <https://www.stutteringcommons.org/>

Specialist stammering centre in London <https://michaelpalincentreforstammering.org/about-stammering/>

Support for adults up to 23 years old <https://www.spacetostutter.org/>



Books

Stuttering is Cool: A guide to talking in a fast-paced world by Daniele

Rossi: <http://stutteringiscool.com/stuttering-is-cool-book/>

Stammering Pride and Prejudice: Difference not Defect by Patrick Campbell,

Christopher Constantino and Sam Simpson <https://www.jr-press.co.uk/product/stammering-pride-prejudice/> You can read chapter one for free here: <https://www.redefiningstammering.co.uk/stammering-pride-and-prejudice-difference-not-defect-first-anniversary-celebration/>

Campaigns

It's how we talk by Stamma: <https://stamma.org/about-us/campaigns/its-how-we-talk>

Find the right words by Stamma: <https://stamma.org/about-us/campaigns/findtherightwords>

No diversity without disfluency by Stamma: <https://stamma.org/about-us/campaigns/no-diversity-without-disfluency>

Video clips

Stambassadors: <https://actionforstammeringchildren.org/get-involved/stambassadors/>

Why you should embrace your stammer by Juan V. Lopez: <https://youtu.be/8J5RUvs2rZA>

Honest Speech by Erin Schick: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j8XOyY54-Ew>

Blogs

<https://www.redefiningstammering.co.uk/2018/11/> by Sam Simpson, an excellent speech and language therapist, person-centred counsellor and advocate for the stammering community.

<https://www.stutterology.com/> Ezra is a person who stammers and an amazing advocate for the stammering community.

Podcasts

<http://stutteringiscool.com/stuttering-is-cool-podcast/>

<https://stamma.org/resources/podcast>

I hope you have found this guide useful. As an independent speech and language therapist, I am available if you need further support.



Stay connected: <https://thatspeechlady.eo.page/email>

Share my free guides with others: <https://thatspeechlady.eo.page/guide>

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