

# Apraxia in Adults

Apraxia (also referred to as apraxia of speech, verbal apraxia, or dyspraxia) is a motor speech disorder caused by damage to the parts of the nervous system related to speaking. It is characterized by problems sequencing the sounds in syllables and words and varies in severity depending on the nature of the nervous system damage. People with apraxia know what words they want to say, but their brains have difficulty coordinating the muscle movements necessary to say those words and they may say something completely different, even nonsensical. For example, a person may try to say "kitchen", but it may come out "bipem". The person will recognize the error and try again, sometimes getting it right, but sometimes saying something else entirely. This can become quite frustrating for the person.

## Characteristics of Apraxia

- Difficulty imitating speech sounds
- Possible difficulty imitating non-speech movements, such as sticking out their tongue (oral apraxia)
- Groping for sounds
- In severe cases, an inability to produce sound at all
- Inconsistent errors
- Slow rate of speech
- Somewhat preserved ability to produce "automatic speech", such as greetings like "How are you?"
- Can occur in conjunction with dysarthria (muscle weakness affecting speech production) or aphasia (language difficulties related to neurological damage)

## Treatment

A speech-language pathologist works with people with apraxia to improve speech abilities and overall communication skills. The muscles of speech often need to be "retrained" to produce sounds correctly and sequence sounds into words. This occurs through exercises designed to allow the person to repeat sounds over and over and practice correct mouth movements for sounds. The person with apraxia may need to slow their speech rate down or work on "pacing" their speech so that they can produce all of the sounds necessary for their message. In severe cases, alternative means of communication may be necessary, such as the use of simple gestures or more sophisticated electronic equipment.