

What is Speech Therapy?

Abnormal speech, language, cognitive and swallowing function can be caused by disease, illness, developmental delay or physical defect. Professional speech-language therapists are trained to determine the cause and treatment strategy for disordered communication. They also work with other professionals to help patients who have cognitive or swallowing problems.

A person who has had a stroke, or a child who has developmental delay, may have difficulty speaking and understanding. Speech therapy can help to establish functional and purposeful communicative skills. People who have head trauma, cancer or psychiatric conditions may have effects on their speech, language or swallowing as well. Dementia or a general deterioration of mental activity, memory or reasoning skills may also require speech-language assessment.

A speech and language exam involves careful assessment of a person's oral facial structure (jaw, lips, tongue, throat, voice box) and function. The speech therapist also looks at the way a person forms sounds (articulation), the sounds produced at the level of the larynx or voice box (phonation), modification of sound (resonation), breath support for speech, and speaking rhythm or rate. The exam may also include an assessment of verbal expression, comprehension and retention, or word recall. Abstract thought, calculation and writing may also be examined. For patients who are nonverbal, the speech therapist uses special instruments, including a computer, to adapt the exam.

In some instances a swallowing evaluation may be needed. Following an instrumental exam on swallowing, recommendations may include diet modifications, compensatory techniques, and/or therapy.

Patients with Parkinson's disease may benefit from speech therapy as well. A program based on the Lee Silverman Approach to treatment with certified speech therapists, and a movement component with certified physical therapists and occupational therapists, will soon be available at Lakeview Hospital. Lakeview Hospital's physical medicine department offers inpatient evaluation and treatment, outpatient treatment and home care. Stillwater area residents can receive this care without having to travel into the Twin Cities.

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