



MYTHS. BELIEFS. STRAIGHT TALK.

One of the most frustrating aspects about stuttering is that it is a variable disorder. In other words, sometimes you may stutter quite a bit and other times you may not. Because it is so variable and complex, stuttering is often misunderstood. This leads many people to believe myths about stuttering. Here we discuss some common myths and “debunk” them with straight talk about stuttering.

I will outgrow stuttering. Many teenagers and adults who stutter hope or believe that they will stop stuttering one day. Many deny that stuttering can be a problem or may even deny that their stuttering exists at all. Others may want stuttering to go away so much that they simply begin believing that it just might. For example, a 9th grade person who stutters was asked how he was going to manage his stuttering in college. The young man replied, “I won’t stutter in college.” This belief may be due to a couple of reasons, such as denial or hope.

Most people who recover from stuttering do so in early childhood. Stuttering usually begins around the age of 2, so if it is going to go away by itself, it usually does so within 6 months to a year. If you continue stuttering into your teenage years, you will most likely continue to stutter throughout adulthood. The good news is that there are many options and choices in managing stuttering productively. However, continuing to avoid dealing with stuttering due to denial or a hope or belief that it might simply “go away” tends to make our problems worse, not better.

I am alone. Many people who stutter grow up feeling alone and isolated. At this point in your life, you may be the only person you know with a noticeable (overt) stutter. You may also be hiding your (covert) stuttering reasonably well from other people. But trying to keep your stuttering a secret from the world may be controlling every aspect of your life. Your friends, teachers, or parents may not feel comfortable talking about stuttering and you may not either. You may feel like stuttering is shameful. You are not alone. Most experts agree that close to one percent of the world’s population stutter. This means that approximately 3 million people in the United States stutter and about 70 million people in the world stutter.

I stutter because I am nervous. While anxiety is not the cause of stuttering, anxiety may make us stutter more severely at times, such as during stressful situations like talking on the phone or public speaking. A frustrating reality about stuttering is that when we want to stutter less, we often end up stuttering more. And when we no longer fear our stuttering, we often end up stuttering less.

Stuttering is my fault. While we may not know the exact cause of stuttering, we are certain of two things: stuttering is not your fault, and stuttering is not your parents’ fault. Stuttering is a biological and neurological condition. As such, stuttering is not contagious like the common cold and is not the result of bad parenting, a stressful childhood or a traumatic event. No one chooses to stutter and no one is to blame.

I am just not trying hard enough. Just as stuttering is variable, speaking strategies and tools we use to manage stuttering are also variable. Some days, no matter how hard we try, speech tools just don’t work very well. In fact, sometimes it is easier to stutter than to use speaking strategies. Some people, including relatives or even some well intentioned, but misguided speech-language pathologists, think that because you can control stuttering some of the time, you should be able to control your stuttering all of the time. This myth is both unreasonable and is absolutely not true. If someone asks or expects you to be “100 percent fluent,” feel free to reply by suggesting that they should never miss a free throw in basketball ever again!

I need to hide my stuttering. Have you ever raised your hand in class or walked up to the counter at a fast food restaurant and found yourself changing what you wanted to say? Have you ever stayed home sick from school or refused to answer the phone so that you wouldn’t have to talk? If you have done any of these things, you are reacting in a normal way to a very difficult situation. For example, one of the authors of this brochure was asked during his freshman year of college, “Where are you from?” Rather than risk stuttering on the w in Wilmington or on the d in Delaware, the author replied, “I forget.” At the time, it felt like anything was preferable to stuttering. But the reality is that the shame of losing your self-respect is far worse than the shame of stuttering. Saying what you want to say, when you want to say it is the most important thing. Stuttering is always allowed.

MYTHS ABOUT STUTTERING

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MYTH: Stuttering is linked to intelligence.

REALITY: There is no link whatsoever between stuttering and intelligence.

MYTH: Nervousness causes stuttering.

REALITY: Nervousness does not cause stuttering. Nor should we assume that people who stutter are prone to be nervous, fearful, anxious, or shy. They have the same full range of personality traits as those who do not stutter.

MYTH: Stuttering can be “caught” through imitation or by hearing another person stutter

REALITY: You can’t “catch” stuttering. No one knows the exact causes of stuttering, but recent research indicates that family history (genetics), neuromuscular development, and the child’s environment, including family dynamics, all play a role in the onset of stuttering.

MYTH: It helps to tell a person to “take a deep breath before talking,” or “think about what you want to say first.”

REALITY: This advice only makes a person more self-conscious, making the stuttering worse. More helpful responses include listening patiently and modeling slow and clear speech yourself.

MYTH: Stress causes stuttering.

REALITY: As mentioned above, many complex factors are involved. Stress is not the cause, but it certainly can aggravate stuttering.



I must speak without stuttering.

Some people who stutter might feel that it is their obligation to their parents, family, friends or even strangers to speak without stuttering. The root of this belief is that we (people who stutter) are broken and believe we are a burden to others. And the reality is that this belief is flawed. As people who stutter, we have a voice, and our voice deserves to be heard. While we may have a social obligation to communicate as effectively as we can, our listeners also have a social obligation to honor our right to freedom of speech.

I shouldn't talk about stuttering.

Feeling shame about stuttering is normal. But talking about stuttering with the right people makes things better, not worse. You may be surprised by how many people will want to listen and will want to help. Start by talking with someone you trust such as a parent, sibling, teacher at school, or friend. You can meet other people who stutter by contacting local support groups or participating in an online support forum. You can also ask your speech pathologist to schedule some group therapy sessions so you can work with others who stutter.

Stuttering will hold me back in life.

People who stutter are as smart and capable as anyone else. History is filled with exceptionally smart, talented and successful people who stutter, including: King George VI; Prime Minister Winston Churchill; physicist Albert Einstein; scientist Charles Darwin; actress Marilyn Monroe; legendary Chicago Bulls star Bob Love; famous zoologist and animal rights activist Alan Rabinowitz; Vice President Joseph Biden; actresses Nicole Kidman and Emily Blunt; professional golfer Tiger Woods; actor and the voice of “Darth Vader,” James Earl Jones; actor Bruce Willis; TV host Mike Rowe; pop singer Marc Anthony; businessman Jack Welch; national news correspondent Byron Pitts; NFL running back Darren Sproles; world-renowned TV correspondent John Stossel; Oscar and Grammy winner Carly Simon; musician Kendrick Lamar; NBA star Kenyon Martin; golf pro Sophie Gustafson; Congressman Frank Wolf; NBA Hall of Famer and NBC Sports commentator Bill Walton; country music artist Mel Tillis; acclaimed actor Eric Roberts; major league baseball player Johnny Damon; American Idol contestant Lazaro Arbos; and many more.