

## The Aging Speech Mechanism:

How a Speech-Language Pathologist can help!

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### Who AM I?

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- Marissa Barrera is a graduate of Columbia University and is currently working towards her PhD in speech in hearing science. Currently, Ms. Barrera is employed as a medical-speech language pathologist in a local hospital where she works with both children and adults. She also operates a small private practices near Union Square specializing in adults with neurological conditions.



## What Happens When We Get Older??

- As we age the muscles in our bodies change.
- Many people notice changes in overall body muscle tone, vision, vocal volume, pronunciation, appetite and memory.
- Don't worry! These changes are normal and can be approved upon.



## Speech Disorders

- Speech changes are very common in older adults.
- The most common speech and language disorders are dysarthria, apraxia, and anomia.
- **Dysarthria** is a speech disorder that occurs from a weakness or in coordination of the speech muscles.
- Dysarthric speech can be described as imprecise or uncoordinated. Often respiratory and articulatory subsystems are weak, resulting in poorly articulated or "sloppy" sounding speech.



## Speech Disorders

- **Apraxia** is difficulty with coordination and sequencing of speech musculature to form words and connected speech.
- Apraxic speech sounds “choppy”.
- It may be hard to start/initiate speech.
- You may find yourself saying, “I can’t get the words out.”



## Cognitive Disorders

- **Anomia** is difficulty finding words, labeling and/or naming objects and retrieving information from your memory.
- People with anomia often says things such as:
  - “You know that place we went on vacation.”  
(Example of memory retrieval)
  - “Honey where are those things you use to open the door, they’re small, you turn them?”  
(Example of circumlocution)
  - “It’s a... Ugh! I have the word in my head I just can’t get it out”  
(Example of word retrieval)



## Cognitive Disorders

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- Listening & understanding information
- Problem solving
- Organizing and sequencing verbal information
- Impaired judgment
- Maintaining attention to a task and a speaker
- Distractibility
- Short-term memory



## What can be done to help?

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- Speech-Language Pathologists (SLPs) are nationally certified and state licensed individuals specially trained in assessment, facilitating and rehabilitating speech, language, reading, writing, voice, cognitive and swallowing skills in children and adults.



## Strategies- Speech

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- Speech-to help dysarthria & apraxia
  - practice with various sounds
  - exercises to improve the movement of your articulators (tongue, lips, palate)
  - vocal fatigue & effective voice use (e.g. exercises- yawn sigh, easy onset)
  - using suitable vocal volume
  - improving the quality of your voice
  - augmentative communication devices (AAC) & voice processors
  - stretch out words
  - reduce rate of speech



## Strategies- Cognition

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- Strategies to help improve anomia, memory, organization & attention to task
  - Repeating
  - Visualizing
  - Writing Down Important Information
  - Associations
  - Alphabet Search
  - Word finding drills
  - Word lists



## Swallowing

- Some individuals experience changes in their ability to eat or drink as they get older. Dysphagia is difficulty swallowing.
- Symptoms include:
  - Dehydration
  - Food getting stuck in the throat
  - Coughing during and/or after meals
  - Gurgly/Wet voice quality when speaking after swallowing
  - Increased or thickened secretions that are difficult to clear
  - Recurrent respiratory infections and pneumonia
  - Refusal to eat/loss of appetite
  - Unusual or noisy breath sounds aka stridor
  - Weight loss



## Strategies- Swallowing

Consult with your doctor and a speech pathologist if you are concerned with your ability to eat and drink or are experiencing significant appetite changes.

Strategies include:

- Change of diet and special liquids
- Safe swallow strategies/techniques
- Oral Motor Intervention
  - Exercises can help increase the movements necessary for effective swallowing.



## Importance of Evaluation

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- Each individual's body changes differently as they grow older.
- Specialized/individualized evaluation help identifying skills that can be improved.
- Techniques are simple, useful and individualized to fit your life.



## More Information

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- For more information about speech and swallowing feel free to contact:
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