

Speech and Language Therapy

Apraxia information sheet



What is Apraxia of Speech?

Someone with AOS has trouble saying what they want to say correctly and consistently. AOS is a neurological disorder that affects the brain pathways involved in planning the sequence of movements involved in producing speech. The brain knows what it wants to say, but cannot properly plan and sequence the required speech sound movements.

AOS is not caused by weakness or paralysis of the speech muscles (the muscles of the jaw, tongue, or lips). Although, can occur together.

The severity of AOS varies from person to person. It can be so mild that it causes trouble with only a few speech sounds or with pronunciation of words that have many syllables. In the most severe cases, someone with AOS might not be able to communicate effectively by speaking, and may need the help of alternative communication methods.

Symptoms include:

- Distorting sounds. People with AOS may have difficulty pronouncing words correctly. Sounds, especially vowels, are often distorted. Because the speaker may not place the speech structures (e.g., tongue, jaw) quite in the right place, the sound comes out wrong. Longer or more complex words are usually harder to say than shorter or simpler words. Sound substitutions might also occur when AOS is accompanied by aphasia.
- Making inconsistent errors in speech. For example, someone with AOS may say a difficult word correctly but then have trouble repeating it, or may be able to say a particular sound one day and have trouble with the same sound the next day.
- Groping for sounds. People with AOS often appear to be groping for the right sound or word, and may try saying a word several times before they say it correctly.
- Making errors in tone, stress, or rhythm. Another common characteristic of AOS is the incorrect use of prosody. Prosody is the rhythm and inflection of speech that we

use to help express meaning. Someone who has trouble with prosody might use equal stress, segment syllables in a word, omit syllables in words and phrases, or pause inappropriately while speaking.

How to get the most from your speech:

- Speak slowly. Think about what you want to say before you say it.
- Break long words and phrases into shorter chunks. You may find it easier to use shorter words.
- Use facial expressions and gestures to help clarify your message. Point to what you want, and if you need to, draw pictures to make your meaning clear.
- If you're having trouble saying something, try saying it another way. Sometimes rephrasing can make it easier to get your message across.
- Try singing. Using melody can make it easier to articulate words clearly.
- Stay calm. If you're having trouble, it's okay to give up for now and come back to it later. Avoid important conversations when you're tired or feeling emotional.
- If you can, write down what you want to say or use an augmentative communication system to get your message across.

How the listener can help:

- Be patient. Give the person plenty of time to communicate.
- Establish the topic, so you both know what you're talking about.
- Ask yes-or-no questions to clarify what you've heard, or ask questions that include two or three choices.
- If you don't understand something, repeat what you have understood, and ask the person to confirm that your understanding is correct. Then focus on the parts of the message that are still unclear. Don't pretend you understand what the person is trying to say. Try a different approach, or agree to come back to the topic later.