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Inspire Care News

Helpful tips for family caregivers

What is a speech therapist?



For many of us, the words "speech therapy" make us think of a classmate in grade school who had trouble because of stuttering. In fact, speech therapists help with many problems that crop up later in life. Consider stroke, Parkinson's, dementia, and brain injury. All these disorders can affect a person's ability to find and form words, put together language, vocalize, and even swallow.

Speech therapists work with speech-, brain-, and throat-related problems. (They are also known as "speech pathologists.") Like occupational therapists and physical therapists, speech therapists are specially trained members of the health care team. Medicare pays for their services if a doctor makes a referral.

What does a speech therapist do?

The first step is evaluation. Depending on your loved one's difficulties, the speech therapist will assess your loved one's ability to

- form words and make sounds
- understand spoken words
- find words and organize thoughts into speech
- regain skills for reading and writing
- control volume or pitch of the voice
- swallow without choking

The speech therapist will then develop a treatment plan. This might involve recommendations to consult your doctor about medication or surgery. Or exercises your loved one can do at home. The exercises may work to improve muscle control of the tongue and throat. Or may rebuild nerve pathways to the brain. Or help your relative learn to pay attention to voice volume or facial expression.

As with many therapies, it is up to the patient to practice at home. This is where you come in, providing support and removing barriers without appearing to nag.

Speech therapists work in various settings: hospitals, rehabilitation facilities, and independent offices. If your loved one meets Medicare's "homebound" criteria, the therapist can even come to the home. Ask the doctor for a referral.



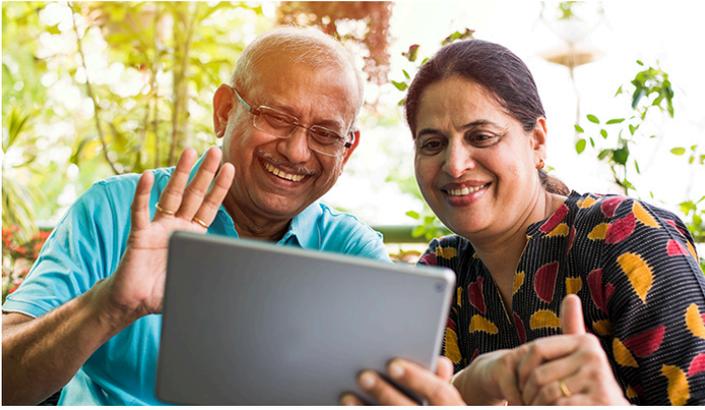
"The speech therapist helped with my brother's talking, but also with his choking when he ate. Swallowing takes a lot more practice and coordination than I realized."

315.447.3164

About Us

Inspire Care has been providing care and support for older adults and their families since 2011. Learn more about us and about our services by giving us a call at 315.447.3164.

Visiting in the digital age



Today, there are many ways to stay in touch with the elders we love. That's a good thing because research suggests that older adults who are socially engaged enjoy greater happiness and a sense of purpose. Those who are isolated and lonely are at a higher risk of depression, heart disease, obesity, and Alzheimer's.

But not all the options for connecting are equal.

Face-to-face exchanges are the best. Meeting in person engages many of our senses—vision, hearing, touch, and smell. Plus, being in the same space together and sharing an occasion deepens our sense of connection.

Other media don't match up. Phones, email, texting, social media ... each has its advantages. But older adults who rely on these media have the same rates of depression as those who don't connect with others.

Video chatting is the exception! In a study of 1,400 older adults, those using apps such as Skype and FaceTime were half as likely to be depressed as those using other media. The visual feedback and "real time" interactions seem to offer many of the benefits of a face-to-face visit. For example, "When I video chat, I get to see my grandchild," or "On email, no one gets my jokes."

More ways to video chat. A focus group of seniors analyzed Amazon Echo Show, the latest video-chatting option of the Alexa digital assistant. It received extremely favorable reviews. They loved the simplicity of saying "Call John."

The downsides. Getting your relative set up may present the biggest obstacle. Your loved one may need help downloading an app and learning to operate a mobile device. Or he or she may need help uploading contacts. Or talk about privacy and the security of data.

There's nothing to equal the value of a face-to-face visit. But if you can't visit often, consider frequent video chatting as your next-best alternative.

"But it's so sad..."

Whether you are caring for a loved one with dementia or helping a relative with cancer, sometimes the sadness of it all feels overwhelming. Especially at the holidays. The sadness is natural, of course. But you don't want to get paralyzed by it.

Pivoting from the sadness

As family caregivers, we need to learn how to acknowledge the sadness. But we also need to allow for joy at the same time so we have the energy to continue providing care. It's not self-centered to be happy. In fact, researchers have found that the "happier" we are, the more we tend to give to others.

The type of happiness that nurtures our giving nature is not the thrill of winning the lottery. Quite the opposite. It's the little smiles and chuckles of every day that create an internal reservoir of contentment. It's the frequency—not intensity—of positives in our lives that fills our personal well.

Cultivating contentment

- **Be selective with your attention.** What we focus on—or don't focus on—has a huge impact on our mood. Ignore the things that make you feel hopeless and focus on what can be done.
- **Give yourself two or three pleasure moments a day.** What feeds your soul? A walk in the park? Listening to music? A relaxing bath? It doesn't have to be a whoop-de-do.
- **Connect with a confidant.** Research shows that a visit or talk with a close friend absolutely boosts mood and confidence. It also strengthens your immune system and improves your thinking!
- **Ease up on your expectations.** Your relative may simply be in his or her natural decline. Provide the softest landing possible. Find out what they would like to do in the time that remains. Keep them as comfortable as you can and create moments of joy whenever possible.

