



# **AIS** AMERICAN INSTITUTE FOR STUTTERING

Speak Freely. Live Fearlessly.

## **What is Stuttering?**

Stuttering is a speech communication disorder. It is marked by the presence of repetitions of sounds or words, sound prolongations and blocks which essentially are silences where no sound is heard despite the person trying to speak. The person stuttering does know what they wish to say but finds himself unable to produce the sound/word as they wish. The most widely held definition of stuttering by Wingate (1968) asserts that a critical component of stuttering is a perceived loss of control on the part of the speaker.

Stuttering is often represented as an iceberg, with the majority of its bulk beneath the surface. The core of the problem of stuttering for many, if not most people who stutter is hidden from view. What others cannot readily observe are the many avoidance behaviors, self-defeating thoughts, and negative emotions that develop over time.

Exposed to the air, the exposed portion of ice might melt, while what is underneath remains solid. Similarly, stuttering treatments that only address the surface features of speaking are only partially effective. Significant change involves improving not only speech fluency, but alleviating speaking fears, reducing avoidance behaviors and improving confidence in one's ability to communicate.

## **What Causes Stuttering?**

Though the exact cause is still not known, research is pointing to a neurological basis for stuttering with a hereditary component. Genetic factors determine whether an individual is born with a predisposition to stutter. Other factors including environment and personal temperament are thought to act as "triggers" to a pattern of developmental stuttering.

For the majority of people who stutter, stuttering begins around age 3-4 years, during a period of time when speech and language skills are developing at a dramatic rate. Separate factors including family history, gender, and overall language skills further influence whether stuttering shows remission in childhood or whether it persists.

75% of children who stutter before age 5 do not continue to stutter as adults. Stuttering is not a psychological disorder, yet many people who stutter do so more severely when they are under stress.

## **How does Stuttering Develop?**

Many of the features of stuttering are learned reactions that develop over time. When the child first becomes aware of stuttering, he or she likely begins to adopt strategies to prevent it. These often include substituting words that are thought to be difficult and avoiding situations where stuttering is expected to occur. As more and more words, people, and situations are avoided because of stuttering, underlying fear of communicating with others continues to grow.

During moments of actual stuttering, the body naturally reacts by exerting excessive force, essentially forcing the word to come out. Since this physical effort seems to “work,” the behavior quickly become a secondary, habitual feature of the individual’s stuttering pattern.

## How is Stuttering Best Treated?

Best current practices in stuttering treatment state that we must address the Stuttering ABC's, namely (A)ffect, (B)ehavior, and (C)ognition. While many attempt to improve their stuttering by learning physical strategies to produce sounds and words, effective therapy must also address the negative emotions and thoughts that develop over time.

At AIS, we specialize in the treatment of stuttering. We develop customized treatments plans that meet the individual needs of each client.

**To learn more about any of these services, please contact us at our offices in New York, Atlanta, or at [stutteringtreatment.org](http://stutteringtreatment.org).**



## About the American Institute for Stuttering

AIS is a leading non-profit 501(c)(3) organization whose primary mission is to provide universally affordable, expert speech therapy to people of all ages who stutter, guidance to their families, and much-needed clinical training to speech professionals wishing to gain expertise in stuttering. Our mission extends to advancing public and scholarly understanding of this often misunderstood disorder.