



The Role of Health Professionals in Down Syndrome

A person who has Down Syndrome was born with it. They have an extra chromosome, which affects their brain and body's development. We do not know what causes Down Syndrome. We know it is not because of age, race, religion or poverty. About one in every 500 children born in South Africa has Down Syndrome. There is no cure for it.

Most people with Down Syndrome will learn more slowly than other people do, but they can still go to school and learn the skills they need to work. They can be helped to become more independent with support from their family, community, school and health professionals.

People with Down Syndrome tend to be very friendly, lovable and loving. They are affectionate and easy-going. They often need help from health professionals to overcome their health problems and reach their full potential.

Health professionals who can help a person with Down Syndrome are:

Doctors and nurses: *diagnose Down Syndrome and provide medical support.*

- Persons with Down Syndrome often have ear and chest infections.
- Some children with Down Syndrome are born with heart problems.

Speech and Language Therapists: *help you feed your child with Down Syndrome and teach them how to speak and understand what they hear.*

- Children with Down Syndrome may have difficulties with eating.
- Children with Down Syndrome are usually slower than other children to learn to speak and understand what other people say.
- Children with Down Syndrome often have learning difficulties.

Audiologists: *help if your child has any hearing difficulties or ear infections.*

- Children with Down Syndrome tend to get wax blockages in their ears, which affects their hearing.
- They may also be born with poor hearing.

Occupational Therapists: *to help children with Down Syndrome to learn physical skills, such as sitting, walking and dressing themselves.*

- Children with Down Syndrome usually have developmental delays.
- They often have low muscle tone and are quite floppy.

Persons with Down Syndrome can live a long life, if they get help for their medical problems. They have feelings and rights just like any other person. They should be treated with the same respect and dignity as anyone else. The sooner you get help for you and your child with Down Syndrome the better.

For More information about Down Syndrome contact Down Syndrome South Africa (DSSA) | 0861-369-672 (DOWNSA) | www.downsyndrome.org.za

For a Speech and Language Therapist or Audiologist close to you, visit the SASLHA website's "[Find a Professional](#)".



SASLHA
South African Speech-Language-Hearing Association

Vision statement

To be the acknowledged voice of Speech-Language Therapists and Audiologists in South Africa.

Mission statement

SASLHA will promote the professions to the public and will promote the best interests of members in all spheres of professional activity; SASLHA will provide opportunities to enhance professional competence through providing and/or co-ordinating learning activities for its members; SASLHA will access knowledge and resources to share with its members to their benefit and that of their patients/clients; SASLHA will lobby and advocate for recognition of the professions by government, the private sector, international bodies; SASLHA will encourage members to aspire to the highest standards of ethical conduct.

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The Role of a Speech Therapist in Stroke

What is stroke?

Stroke is a 'brain attack' that may result in physical disabilities, difficulties speaking and understanding, and swallowing. The main causes of a stroke are a bleed or a clot.

- Cerebral haemorrhage - this occurs when a blood vessel within the brain ruptures.
- Thrombosis - this is caused by a clot resulting in a blockage/obstruction of the blood vessels.
- Embolism - when a fragment of blood clot or other substance, is carried in the circulation (blood supply) from another part of the body and obstructs a blood vessel in the brain. This causes brain tissue in the area to die.

An area of the brain controls each part of the body and some higher functions like memory are controlled by many parts of the brain. When one area is affected, the corresponding part of the body is affected. A stroke on the left side of the brain affects the right side of the body and vice-versa.

What is a Speech Therapist?

A Speech Therapist is a highly trained professional who evaluates and treats children and adults who have difficulty communicating with others as well as those who have difficulty sucking, chewing or swallowing food or liquids.

All Speech Therapists must be registered with the Health Professions Council of South Africa.

What is Aphasia?

Aphasia is a disorder that results from damage to portions of the brain that are responsible for language. For most people, these are areas on the left side (hemisphere) of the brain. Aphasia usually occurs suddenly, often as the result of a stroke or head injury, but it may also develop slowly, as in the case of a brain tumor, an infection, or dementia.

The disorder impairs the expression and understanding of language as well as reading and writing. Aphasia may co-occur with motor speech disorders such as dysarthria or apraxia of speech, which also result from brain damage.

A motor speech disorder is when the brain and the tongue have difficulty communicating. Often the person knows what they wish to say but cannot articulate or speak clearly.

What is the role of the Speech Therapist in stroke?

The Speech Therapist will treat Aphasia, Motor Speech Disorders and Dysphagia (swallowing difficulties).

Tips for communicating with a person who has had a stroke:

- Decrease background noise
- Speak in short clear sentences, but do not talk down to the person
- Ask yes or no questions
- Encourage their attempts to communicate
- Be patient. Many people recover their abilities slowly with time and rehabilitation.
- Augment communication with pictures that the person can point to, encourage writing, drawing, gesture and signing to communicate

Contact a Speech Therapist at the earliest possible time to help with the rehabilitation process.

To locate your nearest Speech Therapist, visit the SASLHA website's "[Find a Professional](#)".



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