Causes of stuttering? [1]

Alice,

Please! What does the latest research explain on the CAUSES of stuttering? Thank you.

Murray

Answer

Dear Murray,

Experts are not sure about what exactly causes stuttering, but they do agree on what doesn’t:

- Emotional or psychological trauma
- Shyness or fear of meeting or speaking to people
- ?Poor? upbringing or ?inadequate? parenting

So, what does cause it? Though specific mechanisms behind stuttering have not been confirmed, there have been a few common types identified. One type of stuttering is so common that it is experienced by just about everyone! It’s called developmental stuttering, which is when a roadblock forms in the process of language development. Small children just learning to speak often repeat a letter sound, word, or phrase (“and ummm,... and ummm,... and ummm”) as they mentally search for the next thought or word. This type of stuttering is seen often in children between the ages of two and five years and usually is outgrown as language skills and muscle coordination become more practiced and fluent. In this case, the cause of the stammer, or stutter, is just that the brain is learning to work as fast as the muscles in the face and mouth.

A second type of stuttering is neurogenic stuttering. This category of adulthood stuttering is described as occurring after traumatic brain injury or stroke. In this case, speech difficulty arises from signaling problems between the brain and the nerves or muscles that conduct talking. Above and beyond these common types of stuttering, no one is sure why some people continue to have problems with stuttering in later childhood or adulthood (of which fewer than one percent stutter).

Recent research suggests there may be a genetic component to stuttering: A mutation in three genes (GNPTAB, GNPTG, and NAGPA specifically) of stutterers have been observed. However, one of the research teams that published these results noticed the high rate at which the stutterers under investigation spontaneously recovered. So, while genes may be
implicated in stuttering, they may not provide the whole picture or explain why stuttering might happen at different points in a person’s life.

Regardless of the cause, people who have had problems with stuttering for more than six months, or who avoid speaking or experience emotional distress due to embarrassment over her/his stuttering may decide to consult a speech-language pathologist. Although no cure for stuttering currently exists, evaluation by a speech-language pathologist can help to pinpoint the mechanism behind the stuttering. The pathologist considers the onset and history of the stuttering and can fully assess speech and language ability. Various strategies to help reduce stuttering and tension when experiencing a stuttering block can often be taught and practiced at home. Treatment can be successful in many cases, and people can lead healthy, happy, and productive lives.

For more information about the treatment and diagnosis of stuttering, visit the National Stuttering Association [2] website. Another source that might be helpful in getting support for stuttering is the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association’s website [3].

Alice!

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