



When speech gets harder: what you can do

Use this guide to:

- understand why speech gets harder with MND
- know what changes to look for
- get tips on how to keep communicating and be understood
- get breathing support for easier speech
- talk to carers and family about how they can help
- explore options with your speech pathologist to see what works for you.

It includes simple strategies, tips, and support options for you and your family.

About this guide

This guide is designed to be used **when speech gets harder**. It is part of the *speech and communication in MND* series of guides and practical tools. This series was developed with MND Queensland, people living with MND, and their carers to help prepare for and adjust to speech changes, get support, and stay connected.

Scan to learn more



Why speech gets harder – what’s happening in the body?

MND affects the nerves that control the muscles we use to speak and breathe. As MND progresses, this can cause changes in the body.



Some of these changes might include:



Lips, tongue and soft palate

These move more slowly or less precisely, making words sound slurred.



Voice

Your voice can sound softer, breathy, strained, or hoarse.



Breathing

Less breath makes it hard to speak in long phrases.



Tiredness

Muscles tire quickly, so speech may be quieter and less clear when you are tired.

Changes you might notice:

- It takes more effort or energy to speak.
- Your voice is softer or harder to hear.
- People ask you to repeat yourself more often.
- It is harder for people to understand you on the phone.
- You are using writing, texting, or gestures to help others understand.
- You cough or get short of breath when speaking.
- Speaking feels frustrating or slows down conversations
- Weakness in your hands or arms makes typing and texting harder.

See a speech pathologist early if you are experiencing these symptoms.

What I can do

Save energy

- Plan important conversations for when you feel strongest (often mornings).
- Don't feel you need to keep talking if you are tired.

Take your time

- Slow down and use short phrases.
- Speak a bit louder, and over-pronounce sounds.
- Say the topic first, e.g. "Shopping – can you get milk?"

Prepare ahead

- Write key points or questions for appointments or important conversations ahead of time.
- In conversations, read or show them, or use your device to speak them.

Use good breathing

- Sit upright to give your lungs more space.
- Take a deep breath before talking and pause often to breathe.
- Ask your physiotherapist or speech pathologist about breath stacking.

Consider voice banking

- If you haven't already, record your voice now so it can be used later in a speech device.
- See *Voice and message banking* for more.

Adapt your environment

- Turn off the TV, radio, or reduce background noise before speaking.
- Make sure people can see your face.
- Sit closer together to make listening easier.

Write, type or use tech

- Use a notebook, phone, or tablet to back up your speech.
- Combine communication tools and tech so you are ready for changes. See *Building your communication system* for more.

Use the 'I have MND' card

- This handy tool states that your speech is affected and asks people to give you time.
- You can carry the card on your phone or in your wallet. Available for download at mndaustralia.org.au/speech

You don't have to use all of these at once – try one or two and see what works for you.

Tips for carers and family

Suggest these tips to your carers, family and friends, and healthcare professionals. If others understand practical ways to help, communicating becomes easier.



Give me time

Let me finish what I am saying; don't rush.



Check back

Repeat what you think you heard to confirm. Don't pretend to understand.



Encourage and reassure

Notice when communication works and celebrate it.



Reduce distractions

Turn off background noise and face the person.



Use a back-up

If you still don't understand me, ask me to shorten the message, use key words, or a back-up system (yes/no, writing it down, a communication board, or device).

Next steps

- 1 Talk with your speech pathologist:** explore boards, apps, and devices that can help now and in the future. See *Communication tools and technology* for more.
- 2 Apply for funding:** NDIS or MND organisations may help with equipment and devices. See *Funding your communication system* for more.
- 3 Staying connected without speech:** As speech changes, communication is still possible. With the right strategies and support, you can stay connected and be heard. See *Staying connected without speech* for more.
- 4 Care for your mental health.** It's normal to feel sad, frustrated, worried or grieve about changes to speech. Talk with your speech pathologist, doctor, or support coordinator about counselling, peer groups, or other supports. See *Mental health and wellbeing* for more.