

STARS: Your Path to Treatment



STARS
Stuttering Treatment
and Research Society

A Guide to Talking With Your Doctor About Stuttering

Summary

Stuttering is a neurodevelopmental condition. It isn't a character flaw, and it isn't something you can "think" your way out of. For many people, stuttering can be a lifelong challenge, but there are treatment options.

Many primary care doctors don't see patients who stutter, and they aren't always up to date on the most current research. This doesn't mean they can't help. It simply means that you, as someone who stutters, might need to guide the conversation in the most beneficial direction.

This guide is meant to help you advocate for yourself, explain what you're experiencing, and have a productive conversation with your doctor about possible treatment options.

1. Before the Appointment: Prepare Key Points

Most doctors appreciate it when you arrive at your appointment with a few notes. It helps them understand what you're dealing with and keeps the appointment focused.

A. Write down what you experience

Include:

- When your stutter began
- How it manifests (blocks, repeats, word substitutions, tension)
- How often it interferes with daily life (avoidant behaviors, anxiety, generalized or situation specific, and professional, social, or academic challenges.)
- Any physical symptoms (tightness, anxiety before speaking, fatigue)

B. Note what you've already tried

- Speech therapy (and whether it helped)
- Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) or other counseling/talk therapy

- Past medication attempts (if any)
- Any lifestyle changes you've tried (better sleep, meditation, stress reduction) even if they didn't prove to be effective

C. Decide what you want from the appointment

Examples:

- "I want to discuss potential medication options."
- "I want to understand what treatments are available for adults."
- "I want a coordinated approach: Speech-Language Pathology (SLP) + therapy + medical support."

Doctors appreciate clarity. Do your best to state your experience clearly.

2. During the Appointment: How to Start the Conversation

Some doctors might not treat stuttering directly so don't assume they already know the most recent research or possible treatment options. You can lead with something simple and neutral:

- "I stutter, and it significantly affects my daily life. I want to talk about treatment options today. There are both behavioral approaches and medical approaches, and I'd like your help navigating them."

Offer a quick 20–30 second overview of your symptoms, including how to frame your stuttering (to your doctor)

- "Stuttering is a neurological condition involving speech timing and motor control. It often coexists with anxiety, but it isn't caused by anxiety. I'm looking for support with evidence-based treatment options."

This helps shift the conversation away from any "just relax"-related advice.

3. Discussing Treatment Options

Doctors benefit from clear, structured ways of thinking about stuttering treatment. You can present it as a three-pillar approach:

Pillar 1: Speech-Language Therapy (SLP)

Let your doctor know what works, this will differ on a case-by-case basis so focus on what you would find most helpful:

- Fluency-shaping strategies
- Stuttering modification techniques
- Desensitization
- Real-world communication practice

Say something like:

- "I'd like a referral to an SLP who specializes in stuttering, not general speech therapy."

Pillar 2: Mental Health Support (Cognitive Behavioral Therapy [CBT], Acceptance and Commitment Therapy [ACT], etc.)

Explain the role:

- Helps to reduce avoidance behaviors
- Helps manage shame and fear
- Improves resilience and communication confidence
- Does *not* "cure" stuttering, but supports quality of life

You can say:

- "I'd like to incorporate a therapist familiar with CBT or ACT for stuttering-related anxiety."

Pillar 3: Medical Options (Medication/Pharmacological Intervention)

Many doctors may not be aware that there are medication trials and psychiatric treatments that are beneficial. You can say:

- "There are medications being studied for stuttering. They often target dopamine regulation and speech motor timing. I'd like to explore whether medication might be appropriate for me."

If they need more info, you can ask:

- "Are you comfortable discussing medication options?"
- "If not, could you refer me to a psychiatrist familiar with stuttering treatment?"

This keeps the tone collaborative, not confrontational. Remember that everyone's on the same team and aligned towards the same goal.

4. Questions You Can Ask Your Doctor

Here is a suggested list of questions you can bring with you:

- "Can you refer me to a speech-language pathologist who specializes in fluency disorders?"
- "Are you familiar with the emerging research on medications for stuttering?"
- "If not, can you refer me to a psychiatrist who works with speech disorders?"
- "Could we discuss a coordinated treatment plan that includes SLP therapy, talk therapy, and possibly medication?"

5. What to Do If Your Doctor Isn't Familiar With Stuttering

You can redirect the conversation with:

- "I'm mainly looking for referrals and support coordinating care."

If they minimize the issue ("everyone stutters sometimes," "just slow down"), you can gently respond:

- "This isn't occasional disfluency, this is a persistent speech disorder that significantly affects my life. I'd like help exploring treatment options."

If needed, you can request:

- A referral to an SLP
- A referral to a psychiatrist
- A second opinion

You're allowed to advocate for yourself!

6. After the Appointment: Next Steps

- Schedule referrals immediately
- Keep a symptom journal
- Bring questions to follow-up visits

7. Short Script to Bring Into the Room

- "I stutter, and it affects my daily life. I'd like to discuss treatment options today. I know there are behavioral, psychological, and medical approaches, and I want to explore which combination is right for me. Can you help me with referrals and next steps?"