

# When To Consider Seeing a Speech-Language Pathologist (Adults)



Speech-language pathologists (SLPs) help with communication, thinking, and swallowing. This guide is for adults and their families or care partners. It focuses on changes you may notice – suddenly or over time – that tell you it’s time to see an SLP.

## Instructions

If you or someone you care for shows any of the signs below, seek an evaluation.

### Getting The Message Out (Talking, signing, writing, or using a device)

When talking or signing, you might notice any of these changes:

- using speech that is slurred, choppy, or hard to understand
- having trouble finding the right word (e.g., saying “that thing”)
- producing words or sounds in the wrong order
- having a voice that sounds hoarse, is weak, or tires easily
- feeling that communicating is harder than it used to be

When writing or using a communication device, you might notice any of these changes:

- producing messages that are shorter, less clear, and/or harder to understand
- having difficulty spelling, or choosing words
- using the device less often—or avoiding it

### Taking Information In (Understanding what you hear, see when people use sign language, or read)

You might notice these signs:

- having trouble following conversations
- feeling frustrated during conversations
- needing things repeated more often
- giving answers that don’t match the question
- having trouble following directions (e.g., medications, recipes, steps for completing forms)
- reading more slowly or losing track of the text
- having more difficulty interacting with others via email, text message, or other forms of written communication

### Communicating Socially (How you interact with others)

You might notice these signs:

- having trouble taking turns in a conversation (e.g., talking over others or not responding)
- struggling to stay on topic
- having little or no understanding of facial expression or tone of voice
- withdrawing from—or avoiding—conversations or group situations
- having difficulty adjusting their communication style for different situations (e.g., talking to a doctor vs. chatting with a friend)

Family members and care partners may notice changes before you do. Getting help early can make a meaningful difference.

## Thinking and Remembering (Focusing, recalling information, problem solving)

You might notice these signs:

- forgetting important information (e.g., appointments, names, recent events)
- asking the same questions repeatedly
- having trouble staying focused on a task or a conversation
- struggling to plan or organize the day
- starting tasks but not finishing them—or taking longer than usual
- having difficulty managing money or paying bills
- acting without thinking things through

## Swallowing (Eating and drinking comfortably)

You might notice these signs:

- coughing or clearing their throat when eating or drinking
- sensing that food or liquid feels “stuck” or is “going down the wrong way”
- having trouble chewing or moving food in the mouth
- keeping food in the mouth or cheeks after swallowing
- taking a longer time to finish meals
- feeling that it’s hard or tiring to eat or drink

### Insurance Tip

Many insurance plans require a referral from a doctor for services to be covered. If you’re not sure, check with your insurance provider.

### Next Steps

If you notice any of the signs above, it’s a good idea to seek an evaluation from an SLP. You can do this in one of two ways:

- Ask your doctor, nurse, or care team for a referral to an SLP.
- Contact an SLP directly.
  - Use your insurance provider’s network or directory.
  - Use ASHA ProFind to locate an SLP near you: [www.asha.org/profind](http://www.asha.org/profind)

**Disclaimer:** This guide is designed to help identify when an adult may benefit from speech-language pathology services. It does not take the place of a comprehensive evaluation by a qualified professional. For questions about this resource, please contact [healthservices@asha.org](mailto:healthservices@asha.org).