

Childhood Apraxia of Speech

What is Childhood Apraxia of Speech?

Childhood apraxia of speech (CAS) is a speech sound disorder. This means your child is not able to coordinate the movement of their mouth to form words or sounds. Your child has trouble saying what they want to say correctly and consistently.

In general, children who have CAS can understand language better than they are able to use it.

CAS is also known as developmental verbal apraxia, articulatory dyspraxia or developmental apraxia of speech.

What Causes CAS?

In most cases, the cause of CAS is unknown.

It is possible that CAS can be caused by a stroke, infection or other illness that affects the brain.

CAS could also be genetic (runs in families). Children with CAS often have family members with a communication disorder or learning disability.

CAS is more common in males than females. It is present from birth.

What are the Signs of CAS?

An early sign of CAS is when your baby does not imitate sounds or babble, or does not do these very often.

When your child is older, they may have one or more of these signs:

- Your child has trouble putting sounds and syllables together in the right order to form words. It is harder for your child to say long or complex words. It is easier for your child to say short or simple words.
- Your child makes inconsistent mistakes when speaking. They may say a difficult word right, but then have trouble repeating it.
- Your child may appear to be searching or fumbling for the right sound. They may say the word several times before saying it right.
- Your child does not use prosody right. Prosody is the tone, stress and rhythm in speech needed to help express meaning. For example, your child may pause at the wrong time while speaking.
- Your child has more trouble moving their mouth on purpose than with movements that happen automatically. For example, your child may not be able to kiss, smile or pucker their lips on purpose.

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What Should You Do if You Think Your Child has CAS?

If you think your child has CAS, call your pediatrician to talk about your concerns. Your pediatrician may refer your child to a speech therapist (speech-language pathologist). They will evaluate your child's speech.

How is CAS Treated?

Children who have CAS will need speech therapy. Speech therapists use different techniques to treat CAS based on what works best for your child. These may include play activities and games.

Your child may also learn other ways to help them communicate such as sign language, pictures or AAC systems (such as pictures, gestures or computer technology).

Each child responds differently to treatment. Some children make more progress than others. It will depend on the severity and cause of the CAS and your child's age.

Support from family, such as home programming and daily practice, will play an important role in your child's treatment.

Will CAS Affect Your Child's Performance in School?

Maybe. It is possible that your child may have trouble communicating their thoughts and ideas in the classroom. This will depend on the severity of their CAS.

Information adapted from the National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders (NIDCD)