

STAMMERING & COFFEE SHOPS

A guide for managers in the food and beverage sector.



STAMMIA



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The Equality Act and the Disability Discrimination Act protect individuals from discrimination when accessing goods and services. Those providing a public service have a legal duty to ensure their services are accessible for all customers, regardless of speech fluency.

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"A waitress in a café was talking to us and asked our names. This is my worst nightmare as a person who stammers. I struggled to say my name and the waitress laughed at me and said did you forget your name? To which I replied no I have a stammer. She did apologise but it ruined my evening and made me feel bad about myself in front of my friends."

THE PROBLEM IN A NUTSHELL

Common, every-day experiences of customers who stammer:



Getting laughed at, mimicked, mocked and told to hurry up when ordering or when asking questions. Very often this will be in front of a queue of people, ie you are being humiliated in front of an audience.



Getting hung up on or spoken over when using the phone. It's not a bad line, your customer stammers. People who stammer get hung up on **ALL THE TIME**.



Feeling pressured in a queue and so worried that they're going to stammer that they order something different. Something that's easier to say.



Worrying about servers asking for their name to call when the order is ready. Many people who stammer struggle to say their name on demand and might give a different name, one that's easier to say.

INTRODUCTION

A wild guess, but probably around 98% of all organisations haven't thought about the needs of people who stammer or stutter (it's the same thing). So if this isn't something you've thought of before, you're not alone.

As the UK's national stammering charity, we're working sector by sector to change this. This guide for the hospitality industry aims to help you understand and provide a great experience for customers who stammer, whether they're ordering in person or over the phone.

At least 670,000 adults in the UK stammer. On top of that, there are people whose speech has been affected following a stroke or who have Parkinson's. We've written this guide to help staff recognise and interact with customers with speech disfluencies. That way, you can create a welcoming and accessible space, boost customer satisfaction and retention, and comply with the law.

Diversity and accessibility enriches our community and makes good business sense. We've seen the hospitality industry respond to that. So thank you for getting this far. Read on.

ABOUT STAMMERING

RECOGNISING STAMMERING

Stammering is when someone repeats or prolongs sounds or words, or has silent blocks when trying to speak. They might be visibly tense or look away as they work hard to get the words out. Or they may look away to avoid seeing peoples' negative reactions. Everyone occasionally repeats or hesitates when speaking, but for someone who stammers it can happen almost every time they speak.

CAUSES

We don't know exactly what causes stammering, but research indicates that **it is mainly neurological**. This means that the way speech is produced in the brain is different for people who stammer. It's just the way some people talk.

PREVALENCE

At least 1% of all adults stammer. That's over half a million people in the UK. It is often hereditary, but it is not related to ethnicity.

EXPERIENCE

Some people try to conceal their stammer. They might do so because they're tired of or worried about negative responses from other people. They'll swap words for ones that are easier to say, avoid saying certain words, and even avoid speaking situations. So while the customer might not always appear to stammer, there can be huge amounts of work (and worry) going on under the surface. Stammering varies from person to person. No two people stammer the same way.

- People do not stammer because they are less intelligent or have a nervous personality.
- Some people may stammer more when they start to speak and less as the conversation progresses.
- It fluctuates. Someone might stammer more on different days, or in certain situations.
- Talking can be exhausting and stressful for some people who stammer.

I **S** *No.* **T**
A *I didn't*
forget **M**
M *my* **E**
name **R**

Join us and help create
a better world for people
who stammer.
stamma.org/join

STAMMA **A**

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JCDecaux

OUR RESEARCH

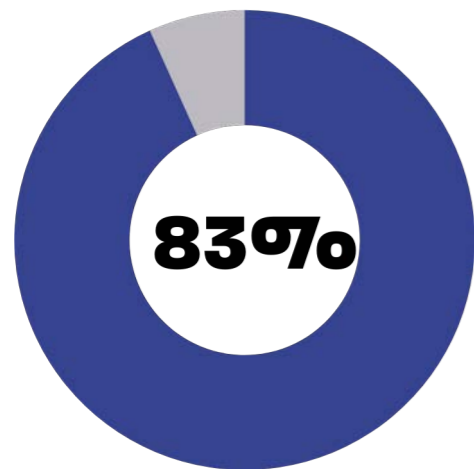
At the start of 2024, we created a survey asking for customer experiences in cafés and restaurants. 1,504 people responded. 662 (47%) said they stammer, 753 (53%) said they didn't. Here's what we learned.

HOW HARD IS IT TO SAY YOUR NAME?

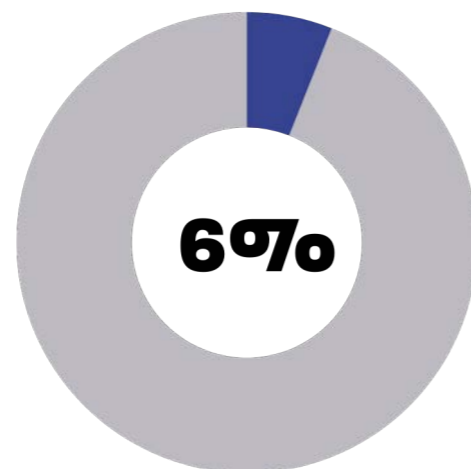
In some settings, staff ask for a customer's name that they can call when the order is ready. 83% of those who stammer said they found it hard to say their name on demand. Of those who don't stammer, only 6% said that they found this hard.

People who find it hard to give their name

People who stammer



People who don't



ORDERING PREFERENCES

We asked which is easier, table or counter service. 60% said it either makes no difference or depends on the situation. However, of all respondents, 34% preferred table service, while only 5% preferred counter service.

People who stammer preferred table service because they can use the menu to point to what they want (19%); they won't be keeping others waiting by holding up a queue (29%); and felt there was less pressure from others in a queue (38%).

CHOICE OF COFFEE SHOP

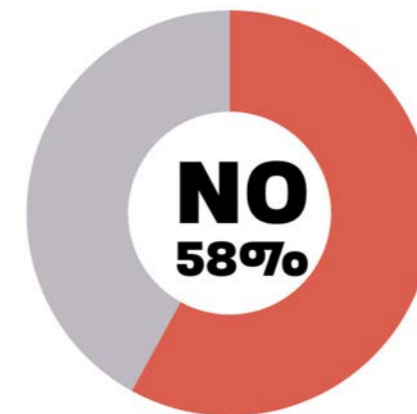
70% of those who stammer had no preference about where they get their coffee. Of those who did, 10% picked Costa, 10% picked independent cafés and 8% preferred Starbucks.

DO YOU ORDER WHAT YOU WANT?

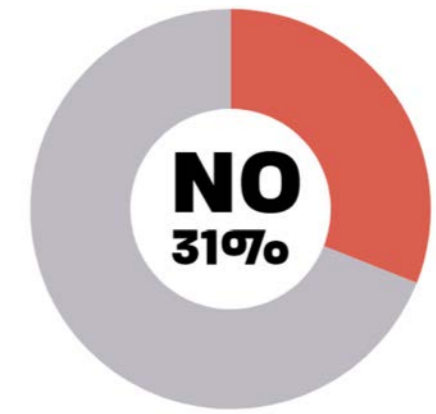
Overall, 46% of respondents said they **don't**. There were lots of reasons given; social reasons, price and dietary requirements. However, for people who stammer it was **almost always** due to concerns about their speech and reactions to it.

Do you always order what you want?

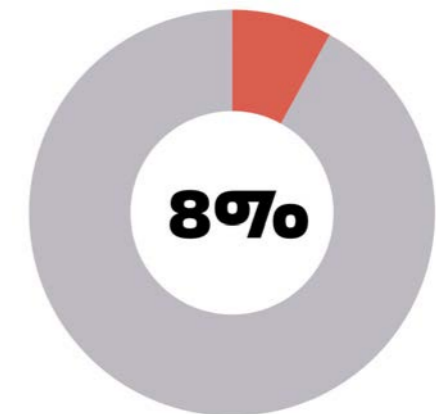
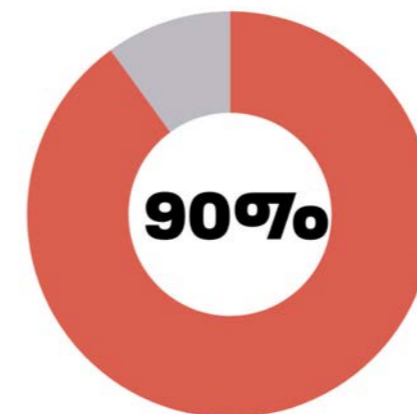
People who stammer



People who don't



Speech given as prime reason for not ordering what you want



A key takeaway (pun intended) from our research, is that food & beverage outlets could do more to make people who stammer feel comfortable. Over the next few pages, we set out ways you can do just that.



HOW TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Giving people time to talk and valuing what they say, no matter how they say it, are the most helpful things you can do.

- It can be tempting to try and help by finishing someone's sentences. Try not to do this. People who stammer often find it intrusive rather than helpful. It can make them feel disempowered and if you get it wrong it can be very frustrating.
- It can be tempting to suggest people 'slow down', 'relax' or 'stop and breathe'. Most people who stammer don't find this helpful.
- If you feel uncomfortable, keep natural eye contact and try not to let your discomfort show. Negative reactions can make people feel uncomfortable and rushed. Show them their stammer isn't an issue and that you're engaged with what they're saying.
- Many who stammer prefer you to remain relaxed and just wait. If the person is really struggling and it feels appropriate, it's OK to offer a reassuring "Take as long as you need".
- If the person is really struggling and it feels appropriate, it's OK to offer a reassuring "Take as long as you need".
- The person may talk very fast to try and get through a sentence without stammering. If you miss something, it's OK to ask them to repeat it.
- People who stammer often find words that can't be swapped, such as menu items, names or addresses, difficult to say. Expect this and give someone time to say them.
- Don't make assumptions based on how someone talks. Knowing that someone stammers doesn't mean you know anything else about them. They're not nervous. They're not uncertain about what they want to say. They just stammer.

ADJUSTMENTS

How you can enhance customer journeys, whatever your establishment.



GIVE PEOPLE A CHOICE

If you can, make sure there's more than one way for your customers to communicate with you. For example, if you need a name on a coffee cup, offer customers the option to write it themselves rather than say it. Or give them a collection number or server buzzer.



HAVE MENUS AVAILABLE

Have a printed menu to hand. This way, people who stammer can point to what they would like to order if they want. It can also help those who can't see the menu if it's on the wall behind you.



QUEUING

Can customers give their orders out of earshot of others in the queue? If you see that someone stammers, maybe move down the counter with them so they have more privacy.



ASKING FOR DETAILS OVER THE PHONE

Make sure that anyone taking orders or bookings over the phone is aware that using the phone can be really difficult for people who stammer. See the next page for details. People who stammer often find those words which can't be swapped or changed the most difficult to say. This can include their name, address, date of birth, account numbers, etc.



TAKE OUR TRAINING

We'd love to create a short snappy video with your staff, so they feel more comfortable talking with customers who stammer. Email us at training@stamma.org

ALL ABOUT PHONE CONTACT

Many people who stammer find using the phone really difficult. Some avoid it altogether. Here are ways you can help.

TAKEAWAY ORDERS & RESERVATIONS

If people use the phone and are stammering, then welcome it. But can you offer alternative channels? For instance online orders or live chat.

SILENT CALLS

Silent calls are the bane of many companies, often viewed as 'bad line', hoax calls, or simply someone who hasn't paired their earbuds properly. But some people who stammer find it very hard to speak, particularly at the beginning of phone calls. If a call is silent, or if there are sounds but no words, it may be a caller who stammers. They may be working incredibly hard to get their words out. There are ways around this, see the script opposite.

VOICE RECOGNITION

If you use voice recognition or voice activated systems, make sure that the technology allows customers to speak at their own pace and without time limits. Offer options to pause and resume the call. Otherwise, offer alternative channels to customers or give them the chance to speak directly with call handlers who are trained in communication differences.

WAITING ON HOLD

Offer a call-back service at a set time to allow people who stammer to prepare for the call. Keep to the agreed time for the call.

DRIVE-THRU

Not strictly phone calls - but the message is the same: some people will stammer when ordering. Be prepared for this and give them time.



SILENT CALLS

Some people who stammer find it very hard to speak, particularly at the beginning of phone calls. If a call is silent, or if there are sounds but no words, it may be a caller who is 'blocking' and working incredibly hard to get their words out. To create space for them to speak, use a script similar to the following:

You *“Welcome to [your company’s name]. How can we help?”*

Caller [Silent or occasional sounds.]

Wait at least 15 seconds, then...

You *“I know it’s difficult for some people to start speaking on the phone. I can’t hear you at the moment, but I’m happy to wait.”*

Caller [Silent or occasional sounds.]

After another 30 seconds...

You *“I can’t hear you and I’m not sure if you can hear me or not. If you’d like me to stay on the line, can you tap on your phone twice, just so that I know you’re there?”*

If caller taps twice, you know to keep waiting. If no tap OR if the caller still hasn't spoken after you've been through the cycle twice, wait another 20 seconds and then say something like...

You *“I’m not sure if you’re there and want to talk to us or not. I’m going to finish the call now, but you’re very welcome to call us back. If the phone is difficult for you and you’d prefer to chat in a different way, you can also contact us by (outline alternative contact methods). Thank you for calling and we really hope to chat with you next time. Bye.”*

End the call.

REAL LIFE STORIES

Here are some of the stories we've heard from people who stammer about their experiences ordering in a café or restaurant. Not all the stories were bad.

"I was ordering my usual from my local café: an oat milk latte. Oat can be a tricky word for me and this time, I struggled with it. The staff member snorted with laughter until I finally managed to say the word."

"Having to order coffee in Starbucks because family wanted to go! They always ask for a name, which for a lot of people who stammer is a nightmare. On my own I can potentially give a different name, but with family and friends I don't feel comfortable doing so. I struggle to get my name out, get something odd written on the cup, and then hear them laughing and making comments to a colleague, which just makes my embarrassment even worse."

"Why do you have to give your name in Starbucks? Why can't it be a memorable word! For me to say my name is something I always trip up over. If I use a different name the people I am with think I've gone mad! If my children are with me they say 'that's not your name!'"

"I had to order two coffees at a drive through. I prepared myself and managed to say two small cappuccinos. I put the 'small' in as it made it easier to say cappuccinos."

"I struggled to get the words out when ordering. Instead of guessing what I was trying to say, finishing my sentence etc the staff member waited for me. It was very accepting and encouraging. This was very different to some other experiences I've had over the years."

"I wanted to order a new coffee which had been advertised and a brownie from behind the glass counter. I knew I would struggle asking for both items so instead ordered an americano and grabbed a pre-packed cake that I didn't need to ask for."

"I needed to provide my name for the order, which is often a challenge. Coffee shops often have everyone standing in a small space queuing therefore the embarrassment of stammering is worse."

ABOUT STAMMA

As a charity, STAMMA has been representing people who stammer since 1978. We've created this guide to help your company improve accessibility so that those with speech differences can have a positive customer experience.

You can make your business more inclusive and improve customers' experiences with staff training and putting in place flexible communication options. Stammering is highly variable and not all the information in this document will apply to everyone. However, offering different communication options will help many customers, not just those who stammer.

We'd love to help you and provide tailored support. Contact us at training@stamma.org

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IT'S HOW WE TALK