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Dyslexia

Dyslexia is common. It is usually first noticed during the first few years at school. There is no cure but early diagnosis and good help and support are essential and can be very effective.

What is dyslexia?

Dyslexia is a specific learning difficulty that causes problems with certain abilities used for learning, such as reading, writing and spelling. Dyslexia is a lifelong problem but good help and support can improve reading and writing skills and so help to achieve success at school and at work. Dyslexia isn't related to a person's level of intelligence. Children and adults of all intellectual abilities can be affected by dyslexia.

Dyslexia causes slow and inaccurate recognition of words and problems with spelling. Dyslexia may cause difficulties with learning as a result of:

- Visual problems through not being able to recognise shape and form.
- Difficulty with reading speed, accuracy or understanding.
- Being unable to put the separate components of words together to create meaning, and being unable to spell the words (phoneme segmentation).

If your child has dyslexia, they'll probably need extra educational support from their school. With appropriate support, there's usually no reason your child can't go to a mainstream school, although a small number of children may benefit from attending a specialist school.

Dyslexia in adults

Dyslexia is usually first noticed during childhood. However, dyslexia can be acquired later in life. Acquired dyslexia follows some form of brain injury (such as a stroke) in a person with previously normal reading ability.

What is the cause of dyslexia?

The exact cause of dyslexia is not known. It often seems to run in families. It is thought that certain genes may act together in a way that affects how some parts of the brain develop during early life.

How common is dyslexia?

Dyslexia is a common learning difficulty. Estimates vary from 1 in every 6 people to 1 in every 20 people in the UK having some degree of dyslexia.

Dyslexia affects all kinds of people and is not associated with intelligence, race or social class.

Dyslexia seems to be more common in boys. However, boys with dyslexia are often noticed more easily than girls because of higher rates of other difficulties, including [attention deficit hyperactivity disorder \(ADHD\)](#), language impairment (problems in the development of language, including grammar and vocabulary) and speech sound disorder (inability to produce the sounds of the language that are accurate and can be understood).

What are the symptoms of dyslexia?

People with dyslexia find it difficult to recognise the different sounds that make up words and to relate these to the letters that make up the words.

Dyslexia often presents at about the age of 7 or 8 years as the child's difficulties become more noticeable in the school setting.

Common signs of dyslexia include:

- Slow and inaccurate reading and writing.
- Need to repeatedly read materials to gain an understanding.

- Difficulty with sequences, such as putting dates in order.
- Erratic spelling.
- Confusion with the order of letters in words.
- Frequent reversal of letters.
- Inability to distinguish sounds, or shapes on the page.
- Difficulty carrying out a sequence of directions.
- Difficulty with planning and organisation.

Other difficulties that may be associated with dyslexia include problems with maths (number dyslexia).

How can you get help?

If you think your child may have dyslexia, the first step is usually to speak to the teacher. Your child's teacher may be able to offer additional teaching support to help your child.

If your child continues to have problems despite any extra support, you or the school can request a more in-depth assessment from a specialist dyslexia teacher or an educational psychologist.

This assessment can be arranged through the school, or you can request a private assessment by contacting an educational psychologist directly.

Adults who wish to be assessed for dyslexia should contact a local or national dyslexia association for advice.

How can dyslexia be treated?

Help, support and appropriate teaching should be structured and intensive. It should start as early as possible, and must be targeted to the individual needs of each person with dyslexia.

Phonics-based treatments are most effective. Phonics-based treatments focus on improving the ability to identify and process the smaller sounds that make up words.

Many schools now have specialist provision for dyslexic children. Universities also have specialist staff who can support young people with dyslexia in higher education.

There are a number of educational methods that can help people with dyslexia overcome their difficulties with reading and writing:

- One-to-one teaching or lessons in a small group with a specialist teacher.
- Supportive home and school environments. Parents and teachers should praise and support the child.
- Multi-sensory teaching (including visual, auditory, movement and tactile elements). Children with dyslexia learn better when they can use as many different senses as possible, such as writing the letter in the air at the same time as saying the letter and its sound.
- Many children with dyslexia find it easier to work with a computer than write in a book. Using the spellcheck tool also helps. Computer software programs are available to teach phonemic recognition and can be very helpful in addition to classroom teaching and support.

Regular eye checks are very important for any child or adult who has difficulties with reading or spelling and who may be dyslexic. Eye problems do not cause dyslexia, but can increase the difficulties caused by dyslexia.

Technology such as word processors and electronic organisers can be useful for adults too. Employers should make adjustments to the workplace to help people with dyslexia, such as allowing extra time for certain tasks.

National dyslexia charities, such as the British Dyslexia Association (BDA), can provide a great deal of information, not only about dyslexia but also on how you can find the help and support you need.

What complications can be caused by dyslexia?

Problems such as behavioural problems, social problems, anxiety, withdrawal, and depression are more common in children with dyslexia. Social problems may increase as children get older and fall further behind with reading skills.

What is the outcome?

Dyslexia is usually persistent and may have a severe effect on academic achievement if a child doesn't receive the help and support they need.

The effectiveness of treatment depends on the initial severity of the dyslexia. The earlier the intervention, the better the outcome.

With appropriate help, support and teaching, children with dyslexia can achieve adequate literacy levels to function in society, although their reading abilities may still lag behind.

Many people affected by dyslexia have good ability in lateral thinking, creative thinking and problem solving. They often do well in many fields, such as the arts, creativity, design and computing.

Further reading

- [British Dyslexia Association](#)
- [Peterson RL, Pennington BF](#); Developmental dyslexia. *Lancet*. 2012 May 26;379(9830):1997–2007. doi: 10.1016/S0140-6736(12)60198-6. Epub 2012 Apr 17.
- [Habib M, Giraud K](#); Dyslexia. *Handb Clin Neurol*. 2013;111:229–35. doi: 10.1016/B978-0-444-52891-9.00023-3.
- [Dohla D, Heim S](#); Developmental Dyslexia and Dysgraphia: What can We Learn from the One About the Other? *Front Psychol*. 2016 Jan 26;6:2045. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2015.02045. eCollection 2015.

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