Health Basics

Dyslexia

What is dyslexia?

Dyslexia is a learning disorder characterized by difficulty reading as a result of problems identifying speech sounds and how they connect to letters and words, according to the Mayo Clinic. People with dyslexia also experience trouble spelling, writing and pronouncing words. People with dyslexia have normal intelligence and usually normal vision.

According to the International Dyslexia Association, dyslexia is considered a learning disability because it can make it extremely hard for a student to succeed academically in a traditional school environment. Students with severe forms of this disorder may be eligible for specialized education and accommodations or extra support services.

As much as 15 to 20 percent of the U. S. population exhibits some symptoms of dyslexia.

What are the signs and symptoms of dyslexia?

Children may show signs of dyslexia before they start school, according to the Mayo Clinic. But the condition becomes more apparent as kids age.

Signs of dyslexia that may appear before children are old enough to attend school include:

- Delayed speech development
- Difficulty learning new words, letters and their sounds
- Problems forming words correctly
- Trouble learning nursery rhymes or playing rhyming games
- Difficulty remembering or naming letters, numbers and colors.

Some school-age signs and symptoms involve:

- Reading well below the expected level for age
- Problems processing and understanding what is heard
- Difficulty finding the right word or forming answers to questions

- Problems remembering the sequence of things
- Difficulty seeing (and occasionally hearing) similarities and differences in letters and words
- Inability to sound out the pronunciation of an unfamiliar word
- Difficulty spelling
- Spending an unusually long time completing tasks that involve reading or writing
- Avoiding activities that involve reading.

Common signs and symptoms of dyslexia in teens and adults may include:

- Difficulty reading, including reading aloud
- Slow and labor-intensive reading and writing
- Problems spelling
- Avoiding activities that involve reading
- Mispronouncing names or words or problems retrieving words
- Trouble understanding jokes or expressions that have a meaning not easily understood from the specific words (idioms), such as “piece of cake” meaning “easy”
- Spending an unusually long time completing tasks that involve reading or writing
- Difficulty summarizing a story
- Trouble learning a foreign language
- Difficulty memorizing
- Difficulty solving math problems.

Dyslexia can lead to complications, such as difficulty learning and mental health issues. Kids with dyslexia are also at an increased risk of developing attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Adults may face negative long-term economic and social consequences.

What are the risk factors for dyslexia?

Risk factors include:

- A family history of dyslexia or other learning disabilities
- Premature birth or low birth weight

- Exposure during pregnancy to nicotine, drugs, alcohol or infection that may alter brain development in the fetus.

How is dyslexia diagnosed?

Although no individual test can diagnose dyslexia, doctors consider a number of factors when making a diagnosis, including:

- A child's development, educational issues and medical history. Physicians evaluate these specific areas and family history, including whether any family members have a learning disability.
- Home life. Parents may be asked to describe a youngster's family and home life, including family composition and dynamics.
- Questionnaires. Children, family members or teachers may be asked to answer written questions.
- Vision, hearing and brain (neurological) tests. These exams can help ascertain whether another disorder may be causing or complicating a child's poor reading ability.
- Psychological testing. Parents and children may be asked questions to better comprehend a young person's mental health in order to establish whether social problems, anxiety or depression may be limiting certain abilities.
- Testing reading and other academic skills. A doctor may require a child to take a battery of educational tests, then have a reading expert analyze the process and quality of the youngster's reading skills.

How is dyslexia treated?

Dyslexia is a lifelong condition, but with the proper help, people living with dyslexia can learn to read and write well. Identifying and treating dyslexia early is vital to helping individuals achieve success in school and life.

Specific educational approaches and techniques can be beneficial in the treatment of dyslexia. These may include one-on-one tutoring and the implementation of techniques that use hearing, vision and touch to improve reading skills.

These treatments focus on helping individuals achieve the following goals:

- Learning to recognize and use the smallest sounds that make up words (phonemes)
- Understanding that letters and strings of letters represent these sounds and words (phonics)
- Comprehending what he or she is reading
- Reading aloud to build reading accuracy, speed and expression (fluency)
- Building a vocabulary of recognized and understood words.

Last Reviewed: March 8, 2019

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.
http://beta.docker.realhealthmag.com/basics/health-basics/dyslexia