



DYSPRAXIA

Learning Disabilities and Motor Skills



What is dyspraxia?

Dyspraxia is a term that refers to a specific disorder in the area of motor skill development. People with dyspraxia have difficulty planning and completing intended fine motor tasks. It is estimated that dyspraxia affects at least 2% of the general population to some degree and about 70% of those affected by are male.

Dyspraxia can affect different areas of functioning, varying from simple motor tasks such as waving goodbye to more complex tasks like brushing teeth.

What are the effects of dyspraxia?

Dyspraxia is a lifelong disorder that affects a person's development in the area of motor development. Though many challenges can persist throughout a person's life, the types of difficulties experienced can change.

Young Children

Babies with dyspraxia may avoid crawling and rolling over, and may resist tasks involving motor skills. As they get older these children are prone to:

- Difficulty with eye movements - they may move the whole head instead of just the eyes
- Difficulty using eating utensils and holding a cup while drinking
- Difficulty walking, hopping, skipping, throwing and catching a ball, riding a bike
- Delay in using spoken language and speech that is difficult to understand
- Bumping into objects
- Late establishment of laterality (right- or left-handedness)
- Difficulty doing fine-motor activities such as tying shoelaces or buttoning clothing
- Difficulty with handwriting
- Sensitivity to touch - may find clothing uncomfortable; and may find hair-brushing and cutting, teeth-brushing and nail-cutting unpleasant
- Poor sense of direction

School Aged Children

Dyspraxia can make it difficult for children to develop social skills, and they may have trouble getting along with peers. Though they are intelligent, these children may seem immature and some may develop phobias and obsessive behavior.

All young people must deal with their rapidly changing bodies. However many young people with dyspraxia may also have the added stress of dealing with coordination problems, as well as speech and academic difficulties.

- Coordination difficulties can be particularly problematic in physical education classes and other sports activities.
- Speech difficulties can interfere with casual conversation, which can result in social awkwardness and an unwillingness to risk engaging in

conversation.

- Writing difficulties such as poor letter formation, pencil grip and slow writing can make school work frustrating.

Teenagers & Adults

The challenges presented to adults with dyspraxia can be seen in all aspects of everyday life. Difficulties can have an impact on:

- Driving
- Completing household chores
- Cooking
- Personal grooming and self-help activities
- Manual dexterity needed for writing and typing
- Speech control - volume, pitch and articulation
- Perception inconsistencies - over- or under-sensitivity to light, touch, space, taste, smell.

It is important to note that a person displaying the kind of difficulties outlined above does not necessarily have dyspraxia. If a person continues to display these types of difficulty over time, testing for dyspraxia by trained professionals should be considered.

Dyspraxia and other developmental difficulties

Though not always, dyspraxia often co-exists with other learning disabilities, such as dyslexia (difficulty reading, writing and spelling) and dyscalculia (difficulty with mathematics); as well as AD/HD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder). The symptoms from these learning disabilities can be similar to those of a person with dyspraxia; and regardless of whether there is an overlap in disabilities, the severity and range of difficulties can vary widely.

Other common difficulties facing people with dyspraxia include low self-esteem, depression, mental health problems and emotional and behavioral difficulties. Weaknesses in comprehension, information processing and listening can also contribute to the difficulties experienced by people with dyspraxia.

What strategies can help?

There is no cure to dyspraxia, however early intervention can help a person learn to deal with his or her difficulties. Depending on the severity of the disability, work with occupational, speech and physical therapists can greatly improve a person's ability to function and succeed independently.

Beginning at an early age, it is vital that parents offer their child patience and encouragement. It can be very frustrating to have difficulty communicating or moving, and a parent can ease that frustration by offering help and support in overcoming these difficulties.

All people with dyspraxia need help practicing simple tasks and can benefit from step-by-step progress into more complex activities. Encouraging easy physical activities that develop coordination can increase confidence. It is also important to encourage friendships to broaden a person's experience and understanding of social relationships.