

Dyslexia

Diagnosis

There's no single test that can diagnose dyslexia. A number of factors are considered, such as:

- **Your child's development, educational issues and medical history.** The doctor will likely ask you questions about these areas and want to know about any conditions that run in the family, including whether any family members have a learning disability.
- **Home life.** The doctor may ask for a description of your family and home life, including who lives at home and whether there are any problems at home.
- **Questionnaires.** The doctor may have your child, family members or teachers answer written questions. Your child may be asked to take tests to identify reading and language abilities.
- **Vision, hearing and brain (neurological) tests.** These can help determine whether another disorder may be causing or adding to your child's poor reading ability.
- **Psychological testing.** The doctor may ask you and your child questions to better understand your child's mental health. This can help determine whether social problems, anxiety or depression may be limiting your child's abilities.
- **Testing reading and other academic skills.** Your child may take a set of educational tests and have the process and quality of reading skills analyzed by a reading expert.

Treatment

There's no known way to correct the underlying brain abnormality that causes dyslexia — dyslexia is a lifelong problem. However, early detection and evaluation to determine specific needs and appropriate treatment can improve success.

Educational techniques

Dyslexia is treated using specific educational approaches and techniques, and the sooner the intervention begins, the better. Psychological testing will help your child's teachers develop a suitable teaching program.

Teachers may use techniques involving hearing, vision and touch to improve reading skills. Helping a child use several senses to learn — for example, listening to a taped lesson and tracing with a

finger the shape of the letters used and the words spoken — can help in processing the information.

Treatment focuses on helping your child:

- Learn to recognize and use the smallest sounds that make up words (phonemes)
- Understand that letters and strings of letters represent these sounds and words (phonics)
- Comprehend what he or she is reading
- Read aloud to build reading accuracy, speed and expression (fluency)
- Build a vocabulary of recognized and understood words

If available, tutoring sessions with a reading specialist can be helpful for many children with dyslexia. If your child has a severe reading disability, tutoring may need to occur more frequently, and progress may be slower.

Individual education plan

In the United States, schools have a legal obligation to take steps to help children diagnosed with dyslexia with their learning problems. Talk to your child's teacher about setting up a meeting to create a structured, written plan that outlines your child's needs and how the school will help him or her succeed. This is called an Individualized Education Plan (IEP).

Early treatment

Children with dyslexia who get extra help in kindergarten or first grade often improve their reading skills enough to succeed in grade school and high school.

Children who don't get help until later grades may have more difficulty learning the skills needed to read well. They're likely to lag behind academically and may never be able to catch up. A child with severe dyslexia may never have an easy time reading, but he or she can learn skills that improve reading and develop strategies to improve school performance and quality of life.

What parents can do

You play a key role in helping your child succeed. Take these steps:

- **Address the problem early.** If you suspect your child has dyslexia, talk to your child's doctor. Early intervention can improve success.
- **Read aloud to your child.** It's best if you start when your child is 6 months old or even younger. Try listening to recorded books with your child. When your child is old enough, read the stories together after your child hears them.
- **Work with your child's school.** Talk to your child's teacher about how the school will help him or her succeed. You are your child's best advocate.
- **Encourage reading time.** To improve reading skills, a child must practice reading. Encourage your child to read.

- **Set an example for reading.** Designate a time each day to read something of your own while your child reads — this sets an example and supports your child. Show your child that reading can be enjoyable.

What adults with dyslexia can do

Success in employment can be difficult for adults struggling with dyslexia. To help achieve your goals:

- Seek evaluation and instructional help with reading and writing, regardless of your age
- Ask about additional training and reasonable accommodations from your employer or academic institution under the Americans with Disabilities Act

Academic problems don't necessarily mean a person with dyslexia can't succeed. Capable students with dyslexia can be highly successful, given the right resources. Many people with dyslexia are creative and bright, and may be gifted in math, science or the arts. Some even have successful writing careers.

Coping and support

Emotional support and opportunities for achievement in activities that don't involve reading are important for children with dyslexia. If your child has dyslexia:

- **Be supportive.** Trouble learning to read may affect your child's self-esteem. Be sure to express your love and support. Encourage your child by praising his or her talents and strengths.
- **Talk to your child.** Explain to your child what dyslexia is and that it's not a personal failure. The better your child understands this, the better he or she will be able to cope with having a learning disability.
- **Take steps to help your child learn at home.** Provide a clean, quiet, organized place for your child to study, and designate a study time. Also, make sure your child gets enough rest and eats regular, healthy meals.
- **Limit screen time.** Limit electronic screen time each day and use the extra time for reading practice.
- **Stay in contact with your child's teachers.** Talk with teachers frequently to make sure your child is able to stay on track. If needed, be sure he or she gets extra time for tests that require reading. Ask the teacher if it would help your child to record the day's lessons to play back later.
- **Join a support group.** This can help you stay in contact with parents whose children face similar learning disabilities. Support groups can provide useful information and emotional support. Ask your doctor or your child's reading specialist if there are any support groups in your area.

Preparing for your appointment

You may first bring up your concerns with your child's pediatrician or family doctor. To ensure that another problem isn't at the root of your child's reading difficulties, the doctor may refer your child to a:

- Specialist, such as an eye doctor (ophthalmologist)
- Health care professional trained to evaluate hearing (audiologist)
- Doctor who specializes in brain and nervous system disorders (neurologist)
- Doctor who specializes in the central nervous system and behavior (neuropsychologist)
- Doctor who specializes in children's development abilities and behavior (developmental and behavioral pediatrician)

You may want to ask a family member or friend along, if possible, for support and to help you remember information.

Here's some information to help you prepare for your appointment:

What you can do

Before your appointment, make a list of:

- **Any symptoms your child is experiencing** and the ages when symptoms were first noticed, including any symptoms that may seem unrelated to the reason for the appointment
- **Key personal information**, including any major stresses or recent life changes
- **Any medications**, vitamins, herbs or other supplements your child is taking, including the dosages
- **Questions to ask** your doctor to help you make the most of your appointment

Questions to ask your doctor may include:

- What do you think is the cause of my child's difficulty with reading and understanding?
- Are there other diagnoses that can be associated with or confused with dyslexia?
- What kinds of tests does my child need?
- Should my child see a specialist?
- How is dyslexia treated?
- How quickly will we see progress?
- Should other family members be tested for dyslexia, too?
- What sources of assistance or support do you recommend?
- Are there any brochures or other printed materials that I can have? Can you recommend any websites?
- Are there any local educational resources for dyslexia?

Feel free to ask other questions during your appointment.

What to expect from your doctor

Your doctor is likely to ask you a number of questions. Be ready to answer them to reserve time to go over any points you want to focus on. Your doctor may ask:

- When did you first notice that your child was having trouble reading? Did a teacher bring it to your attention?
- How is your child doing academically in the classroom?
- At what age did your child start talking?
- Have you tried any reading interventions? If so, which ones?
- Have you noticed any behavior problems or social difficulties you suspect may be linked to your child's trouble reading?
- Has your child had any vision problems?

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