

What are learning disabilities?

Learning disabilities are a group of neurodevelopmental conditions that interfere with a person's ability to receive, store, process, and produce information. There are many different types of learning disabilities (LD). LDs can vary from mild to severe and affect a child's ability to read, write, speak, spell, do mathematical calculations, and problem-solve. They can also affect an individual's attention, memory, coordination, social skills, and emotional maturity.

Children with learning disabilities typically have average or above-average intelligence, but their performance in a certain area falls below their expected level of achievement for their age group.. Learning disabilities are NOT the same as intellectual disability, sensory processing disorder, ADHD, or autism. Learning disability is a lifelong condition, but the sooner it is detected, the more likely steps can be taken to address the challenges and limitations that an LD represents.

Everyone's brain is constantly receiving and absorbing information. In children with learning disabilities, the brain processes information differently than brains of other children typically do. As a result, children with LDs learn differently than their peers and may require more help. Although learning disabilities occur in very young children, they are usually not recognized until a child reaches school age. Approximately 8-10% of American children under the age of 18 years have some type of learning disability.

What are the common types of learning disabilities?

- **Dyslexia:** This is a difficulty with processing language. People with dyslexia have difficulties with reading, writing, and spelling. They may be slow readers, confuse letters and sounds, have difficulty sounding out words, and have difficulty remembering the content of what they have just read.
- **Dyscalculia:** This is a difficulty with math skills. A child with dyscalculia may have difficulties with calculation, trouble remembering basic math facts, and a poor understanding of time and money. They may have difficulty doing basic math problems in their head, learning to count by 2s, 3s, and 5s, and remembering multiplication tables.
- **Dyspraxia:** This is a difficulty with fine motor skills. Children with dyspraxia may have difficulty with things such as handwriting, using scissors, buttoning buttons, and drawing.
- **Dysgraphia:** This is a difficulty with written expression. People with dysgraphia have difficulties with handwriting, spelling, and composition. They may have illegible handwriting and have difficulty putting their thoughts onto paper.

What causes learning disability?

Learning disabilities can be genetic, meaning there may be other family members who also have difficulty learning. Learning disability can also be a result of exposure to drugs or alcohol during pregnancy, lack of oxygen during or after the birth process, or low weight at birth. Often, the cause of

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learning disability cannot be identified. About one-third of children with a learning disability also have ADHD, but learning disability is a separate condition from ADHD.

What can I do if I suspect my child has a learning disability?

If you are concerned about a learning disability in your child, you should discuss your concerns with your child's teachers, school counselor, and pediatrician. If your child is struggling academically, a formal evaluation of your child's learning abilities may be needed. You can submit a written request for a formal educational evaluation through your child's school system, or you can request a private evaluation from a neuropsychologist.

Neurologists typically do not evaluate for LDs or diagnose children with learning disabilities, although they may be able to examine children to ensure that another medical or neurological condition is not contributing to the developmental or learning issues.

Once a learning disability is confirmed, the appropriate changes can take place in the classroom and at home. Your child may require simple academic accommodations or more intensive special education. Accommodations are based on the results of the educational evaluation and the recommendations of educational specialists in the school setting.

In some cases, your child may benefit from therapies (such as speech or occupational therapy) or tutoring outside the classroom. There is no medical treatment for learning disability, but early identification and academic intervention should allow your child to be successful.

Resources and References:

<http://www.ncld.org>

<https://www.kidshealth.org/en/kids/learning-disabilities.html#catbrain>

<https://www.ninds.nih.gov/health-information/disorders/learning-disabilities>