Dyslexia

Dyslexia is when children and adults who have normal intelligence and opportunities to learn, have a hard time reading.

CAUSES

Although the exact cause of dyslexia is unknown, research is ongoing. The main problem of dyslexia seems to be a lack of awareness of phonemes. Phonemes are the smallest unit of spoken language. An example of a phoneme would be the letter *m* in *mat* or *b* in *bat*. Children with dyslexia are unable to distinguish or manipulate sounds within spoken words. It appears that children with dyslexia do not use the most effective part of their brain to read. Dyslexia often runs in families.

SYMPTOMS

- When people with dyslexia read aloud, they often struggle with recognizing single words. Their reading is cautious. They often pronounce words incorrectly. There may be repeated attempts at sounding out words.
- Children with dyslexia often have a normal vocabulary (words understood and used). They often have an excellent ability to understand what someone says out loud.
- Children with dyslexia may have problems with rhyming games and learning the names for letters and numbers early on in school. They may resist reading out loud in school and at home.
- This problem tends to persist throughout a person's life. Over time, reading accuracy can improve, but the speed of reading remains slow.
- Spelling problems may exist. Some children with dyslexia also have attention span (ability to focus) and hyperactivity problems. Handwriting tends to be hard to learn and sloppy. There may be problems with left to right directions. There may be problems with tasks that have many steps. Telling time with clocks with hands can be hard to learn.
- Children can become discouraged about school and their poor grades. They may act out or have other school behavior problems.

DIAGNOSIS

The diagnosis of dyslexia is made by a careful review of the child's development and school history. Teachers' reports are important clues. Testing of reading, language and spelling may be done. Intelligence, attention span, and memory skills may also be tested.

TREATMENT

There is no cure for dyslexia. The best treatment is done early and throughout the child's school career. Acting on the problem in kindergarten and first grade can often result in a child achieving grade level in reading. In the elementary grades, the focus should be on improving recognition of sounds and syllables. Working with vocabulary, reading comprehension (understanding) and spelling is important. Common effective classroom strategies include:

- Tests without time limits.
- Oral (out loud) tests.
- Reduce or stop spelling tests.
- Do not force oral reading in front of the class. If this is not possible, then let the child practice the reading first.
- Grade on content, not spelling or grammar.
- Avoid copying tasks.
- Avoid or reduce essay tests.

In junior high, high school and college, dyslexia is best managed by making arrangements for the student. Things that often help include:

- Tape recorders in the classroom.
- Laptop computers with spell checkers.

- Access to lecture and class notes.
- Recorded books.
- Oral tests or reports instead of multiple choice tests.
- Separate, quiet rooms for test taking.

Medications do not help dyslexia. Medications can be used for hyperactivity or attention span problems. Counseling can help behavioral issues.

HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS

- Reading out loud to parents and other adults is an important way to improve a child's word recognition, speed and ease of reading, and understanding.
- Tutoring is often helpful.
- Parents and teachers should meet often. This will help monitor the child's school performance and make sure that approaches to the child are the same at home and at school.

SEEK MEDICAL CARE IF:

Your child is overly discouraged or wants to quit school.

Your child show signs of attention span problems, such as:

- Poor or short attention span in play or school work.
- Difficulty finishing or shows resistance to schoolwork or chores.
- Disorganized work or activities.
- Being easily distracted.
- Being forgetful around daily activities.
- Often losing items needed for tasks or activities.

Your child shows signs of hyperactivity or impulsivity (hasty actions), such as:

- Difficulty staying seated in class or at home.
- Fidgeting or squirming when seated.
- Always 'on the go.'
- More active than is appropriate for the situation.
- Difficulty playing quietly.
- Talking too much.
- Difficulty waiting turn.
- Blurting out answers before the questions are completed.
- Interrupting when others are talking or playing.

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