

Dyspraxia

What is dyspraxia?

Dyspraxia - also known as Developmental Coordination Disorder (DCD) - affects motor coordination. It is thought to be caused by a disruption in the way messages from the brain are transmitted to the body, which can affect a person's ability to perform movements in a smooth, coordinated way. People with dyspraxia may also have associated difficulties with speech, language, perception and thought.

While dyspraxia affects fine and gross motor skills, it is distinctly different from other mobility disorders, such as cerebral palsy, and the difficulties often caused by stroke.

In the past, it was known as 'clumsy child syndrome', as it was thought that it only affected children. However, this is not the case - people do not 'grow out of' dyspraxia. The effects remain the same as people get older, although they tend to learn how to manage their difficulties better with time.



How common is dyspraxia?

It is thought that around 6% of the population have dyspraxia, with 2% being severely impacted by the condition. Yet, despite it being as prevalent as dyslexia and significantly more so than autism, dyspraxia is much less well known.

Dyspraxia occurs across all intellectual abilities. Along with ADHD, autism and dyslexia, it is a neurodiverse condition and is considered a specific learning difference. Neurodiverse conditions can overlap or co-occur, meaning individuals may have another of these conditions, alongside their dyspraxia.

The language we use when talking about dyspraxia

When talking about disability, and neurodiversity in particular, there are conflicting views about whether person-first language (for example, 'a person with dyspraxia') or identity-first language (for example, 'a dyspraxic person') should be used. Neurodivergent people usually prefer identity-first language.

You will notice in this factsheet that we use both. It is always best to ask the individual how they prefer to refer to themselves when talking about their condition.

What skills and strengths do people with dyspraxia have?

People with dyspraxia can bring a number of key strengths and skills to the workplace:

- Creativity, imagination and original thinking
- Strategic thinking
- Visual thinking
- Inventiveness and good problem-solving skills
- An ability to work methodically and identify patterns, links and inter-relationships
- Good analytical skills and attention to detail
- Thoroughness
- Determination, resilience and motivation
- A high level of empathy and patience with others
- An ability to develop their own strategies to overcome difficulties.

What challenges and difficulties can dyspraxic people experience?

People with dyspraxia may experience difficulties in the following areas:

Coordination and sensory sensitivity

Dyspraxia can affect all elements of coordination between the brain and the body. It can impact both fine motor skills, such as grip and dexterity (which can sometimes make writing or operating machinery difficult, for example), as well as gross motor skills, such as balance and body awareness (meaning people with the condition may have an unusual gait and bump into or drop things more often).

Some dyspraxic people may also have heightened sensitivity to light, temperature, sound or touch.

Speech, language and visual perception

Dyspraxia can cause problems with:

- Pronunciation
- Reading speed
- Copying and proofreading
- Misreading or misunderstanding information
- Focusing on information
- Blurred vision

Concentration and memory

Dyspraxia can make it difficult for people to maintain attention and focus, especially when there are distractions and interruptions. Some people can also experience excessive tiredness. This can lead to difficulties with multi-tasking, returning to tasks after a break and staying on track with work.

Organisational skills

People with dyspraxia often find it difficult to plan and prioritise work and meet deadlines. Their work area may be disorganised, and they can be prone to forgetting or losing things or missing appointments. Some people also have a tendency to get lost when travelling.

Other challenges

All of these challenges mean communication and social situations can be difficult for dyspraxic people, which can also lead to confidence and self-esteem issues. As a result, they may avoid social situations, doubt their abilities (especially at work), and be concerned about change and trying new activities.

Dyspraxia affects people differently, so it is important not to assume that someone with the condition will be affected by all of the potential difficulties covered here. The individual is the expert in their condition so they should be your number one source of information about how it affects them.

Helpful tips for supporting someone with dyspraxia at work

Whether you have an employee, colleague or customer who is dyspraxic, there are some simple things you can do to make their life easier and support them with some of the key areas they may struggle with.

Work environment

- Remove any potential trip or spill hazards, such as chairs, wires or drinks
- Try to allocate a workstation in a quieter area with natural light
- Avoid asking them to work in large, noisy open spaces with lots of distractions.

Training

- When delivering training, use a mixture of written and verbal instructions plus practical demonstrations
- Follow up group learning in a 1:1 session if necessary
- Provide notes, lists, diagrams and handouts to support learning.

Organisation and time management

- Write down any important information or appointments and highlight important details
- Encourage the use of diaries, alarms and checklists as reminders
- Try to avoid interrupting or distracting them from their main task
- Suggest that they focus on one task at a time
- Encourage them to be tidy and organised with a clear place for everything
- Help them to develop a routine and regular structure so that they can plan their day.



Communication, teamwork and social skills

- Allow them to communicate via email and text if they find this easier than calling and speaking on the phone
- Consider using assistive technology, for example, you could provide speech-to-text software on their computer or phone or allow them to type notes on a tablet or laptop instead of writing them down
- Avoid asking them to write or speak in front of others
- Allow plenty of time for them to give answers to questions and avoid repeating questions unless they request you to do so
- Provide support to help them integrate into a new team or group, for example, by allocating a work buddy.

Remember, the individual is the expert in their condition – if in doubt, check with them!