

Facts and Myths About Dyslexia

What Is Dyslexia?

Dyslexia is a language-based learning disability. Dyslexia refers to a cluster of symptoms, which result in people having difficulties with specific language skills, particularly reading. Students with dyslexia may experience difficulties in other language skills such as spelling, writing, and speaking. Dyslexia is a life-long status, however, its impact can change at different stages in a person's life. It is referred to as a learning disability because dyslexia can make it very difficult for a student to succeed academically in the typical instructional environment.

What Causes Dyslexia?

The exact causes of dyslexia are still not completely clear, but anatomical and brain imagery studies show differences in the way the brain of a dyslexic person develops and functions. Moreover, people with dyslexia have been found to have problems with discriminating sounds within a word, a key factor in their reading difficulties. Dyslexia is not due to either lack of intelligence or a desire to learn; with appropriate teaching methods dyslexics can learn successfully.

Dyslexia occurs in people of all backgrounds and intellectual levels. In addition, dyslexia runs in families; dyslexic parents are very likely to have children who are dyslexic. Some people are identified as dyslexic early in their lives, but for others their dyslexia goes unidentified until they get older.

What Are the Effects of Dyslexia?

The impact that dyslexia has is different for each person and depends on the severity of the condition and the approaches of the remediation. The most common effects are problems with reading, spelling, and writing. Some dyslexics do not have much difficulty with early reading and spelling tasks, but do experience great problems when more complex language skills are required, such as grammar, understanding textbook material, and writing essays.

People with dyslexia can also have problems with spoken language. They may find it difficult to express themselves clearly, or to fully comprehend what others mean when they speak. Such language problems are often difficult to recognize, but they can lead to major problems in school, in the workplace, and in relating to other people. The effects of dyslexia reach well beyond the classroom.

Dyslexia can also affect a person's self-image. Students with dyslexia often end up feeling "dumb" and less capable than they actually are. After experiencing a great deal of stress due to academic problems, a student may become discouraged about continuing in school.

Facts and Myths About Dyslexia *(continued)*

Facts About Dyslexia

Startling facts about dyslexia and related language-based learning disabilities:

- Fifteen to twenty percent of the population has a reading disability.
- Of students with specific learning disabilities who receive special education services, seventy to eighty percent have deficits in reading. Dyslexia is the most common cause of reading, writing, and spelling difficulties.
- If children who are dyslexic get effective phonological training in kindergarten and first grade, they will have significantly fewer problems in learning to read at grade level than do children who are not identified or helped until third grade.
- Seventy four percent of the children who are poor readers in the third grade remain poor readers in the ninth grade.
- Individuals inherit the genetic links for dyslexia.
- Dyslexia affects males and females nearly equally, and people from different ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds as well.

Myths About Dyslexia

In being alert to clues to dyslexia, it is also important to be aware of some of the popular misconceptions and myths surrounding the disorder. Sometimes a child's diagnosis is wrong or delayed because she fails to demonstrate one or more of the presumed "symptoms."

Myth: *Dyslexic children see letters and words backward, and reversals (writing letters and words backward) are an invariable sign.*

Truth: While it is true that dyslexic children have difficulties attaching the appropriate labels or names to letters and words, there is no evidence that they actually see letters and words backward.

Myth: *Mirror writing is a symptom of dyslexia.*

Truth: In fact, backwards writing and reversals of letters and words are common in the early stages of writing development among dyslexic and nondyslexic children alike. Because these beliefs about dyslexia are so prevalent, many dyslexic children who do not make reversals are often undiagnosed. Dyslexic children have problems in naming letters but not in copying letters.

Myth: *More boys than girls have dyslexia.*

Truth: Boys' reading disabilities are indeed identified more often than girls', but studies indicate that such identification is biased. The actual prevalence of the disorder is nearly identical in the two sexes.

Facts and Myths About Dyslexia *(continued)*

Myth: *Dyslexia can be outgrown.*

Truth: Yearly monitoring of phonological skills from first through twelfth grade shows that the disability persists into adulthood. Even though many dyslexics learn to read accurately, they continue to read slowly and not automatically.

Myth: *Smart people cannot be dyslexic.*

Truth: Intelligence is in no way related to phonological processing, as scores of brilliant and accomplished dyslexics—among them William Butler Yeats, Albert Einstein, George Patton, John Irving, Charles Schwab, and Nicholas Negroponte—attest.

Myth: *Left-handedness, difficulties with spatial (including right-left) orientation, trouble tying shoelaces, and clumsiness are associated with dyslexia.*

Truth: These are certainly not core findings that we would expect in most people with dyslexia, but of course there are clusters of people within the larger population of individuals with dyslexia who are also left-handed or who have spatial difficulties. Whatever subgroups of children with dyslexia may exist, it is clear that the vast majority of the dyslexic population shares a common phonologic weakness.