



## Adult diagnosis of dyspraxia/Developmental Coordination Disorder (DCD)

### What is dyspraxia/DCD?

Dyspraxia is a common disorder affecting fine and/or gross motor coordination in children and adults. This lifelong condition is also known as Developmental Coordination Disorder (DCD), a condition that is formally recognised by international organisations including the World Health Organisation. Dyspraxia/DCD is distinct (separate) from other motor disorders such as cerebral palsy and stroke and occurs across the range of intellectual abilities. Individuals vary in how their difficulties present and their difficulties may change over time depending on the situation and the person's life experience.

An individual's coordination difficulties can affect their participation and performance of daily life activities at home, in education, at work and in social settings.

Children often present with difficulties with self-care skills, writing, typing, riding a bike and play, as well as other educational and recreational activities. In many cases these difficulties continue into adulthood, also affecting a person's ability to learn new skills such as driving a car or DIY.

Although dyspraxia/DCD may occur in isolation, the condition frequently coexists with other conditions such as autism, Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD), dyslexia, language disorders and social, emotional and behavioural impairments. These co-occurring difficulties can have a serious negative impact on daily life, affecting a person's employment and educational experiences.

The Dyspraxia Foundation recognises many people with dyspraxia/DCD experience difficulties planning, organising and carrying out movements in the right order in everyday situations. While DCD is often used as an umbrella term to describe a person's motor difficulties, we use the term 'dyspraxia' to refer to those people who have additional non-motor problems such as poor memory, perception, processing speed, planning, organising and sequencing skills. When combined with poor motor coordination, these difficulties can have a significant negative impact on everyday life and social/emotional well-being.

Dyspraxia/DCD is estimated to affect 5% of the population, 2% severely. In addition to the difficulties listed above there may also be difficulties with:

- **Fine muscle control** which may cause problems with writing, binocular focus of the eyes, or control of speech muscles.
- **Gross motor** difficulties may show up when learning to ride a bicycle or a car, and when keeping balance on a bus.
- **Perceptual difficulties** might make it hard for a person to interpret information through the senses: the world may feel too bright, too loud or too fast causing 'overload,' stress, depression, anger or panic attacks.

- **Organisational difficulties** at home and in the workplace affecting time and task management, keeping things in order, remembering instructions.

It is important to remember that not all adults with dyspraxia/DCD fit exactly the same description: everyone is different. On the plus side, adults with dyspraxia/DCD can be very creative, empathetic, hardworking, persistent, direct and honest.

## How and when to seek an assessment for dyspraxia/ DCD

The type of assessments that are appropriate for use with adults with dyspraxia/D.C.D. will depend on the purpose of the assessment. Currently there is no 'gold standard' tool for diagnosing dyspraxia in adults, however, the Adult DCD checklist may be used as a starting point. This is free to download and can be found here:

<http://psychology.research.southwales.ac.uk/research/developmental-psychology/amanda-kirby/>

- **General Practitioners.** If you think you may have dyspraxia/DCD it is important to seek a medical opinion so that other possible causes of your symptoms can be eliminated. Unfortunately there are no nationally-agreed guidelines for the diagnosis of dyspraxia/DCD in adults. General Practitioners<sup>1</sup> (GPs) are advised by the British Medical Association (BMA) to refer over 16's with dyspraxia to an Occupational Therapist (OT) for support so ask your GP to refer you to your local adult OT service.
- **Occupational Therapists** are interested in helping people to better manage the activities that make up their daily lives at home, at college, in the workplace and/or in other settings. They will look at both the motor and non-motor factors that make activities a challenge and will help you to come up with solutions to the problems that affect you most in your daily lives. Low self-esteem, stress, depression, anxiety can be the result of trying to cope with dyspraxia/DCD. An OT assessment can examine the sensory stressors you are coping with, providing you with practical strategies to help with stress and mental health problems.
- **Funding** for an assessment can be problematic as services for adults with dyspraxia/DCD may not be available via the NHS. Some local charities may help you to fund a private assessment if you have an 'educational need' but this will need research on your part. Fees for an independent assessment vary but currently range from several hundred pounds to over a thousand pounds. To find a private Occupational therapist in your area visit [www.cotss-ip.org.uk](http://www.cotss-ip.org.uk) for Directory of Independent Occupational therapists and a help line.
- An **assessment** by an OT or educational psychologist for practical advice before going to college or university will enable appropriate adjustments and support to suit your learning style to be identified (see our factsheet for Further/ Higher Education for more details). An assessment might enable students to access Learner Support Funding or the DSA (Disabled Students Allowance). If you are already in further education or university, contact your learning support department to arrange an assessment. Some colleges and universities have some discretionary funding to help with fees for assessments.

<sup>1</sup> "Understanding ADHD, Autism, Dyslexia and Dyspraxia" by Prof Colin Terrell. A Family Doctor book Published in association with the BMA.

- If you are **unemployed** (See our factsheet on Dyspraxia/DCD in the Workplace) an assessment by an OT or psychologist will help identify your strengths and any 'reasonable adjustments' that will help you at work. If you are actively seeking work, an assessment may be paid for by Job Centre Plus. You may need to find a therapist or psychologist who will assess you first and give Job Centre Plus their details.
- If you are experiencing difficulties in the workplace because of your dyspraxia/DCD an assessment may help to identify strategies and the support you need to be successful in your work. Please see our factsheet on "Dyspraxia/D.C.D. in the Workplace"
- If dyspraxia/DCD impacts severely on your communication, you may want to seek advice or intervention from a **Speech and Language Therapist**. A Speech and Language Therapist will provide a holistic assessment of the different areas of communication. NHS funding for speech and language therapy services for adults with developmental conditions are scarce. Ask your GP to refer you to your local Adult Learning Disability speech and language therapy service if available. Seeking a private assessment may be the most viable option. The following website provides information on independent Speech and Language Therapists in the UK <http://www.helpwithtalking.com/>.

### What does an assessment involve?

- **An Occupational Therapist** with specialist training in dyspraxia/DCD should offer an holistic assessment covering motor coordination, processing & organisational skills, learning styles and sensory processing. The assessment should focus on issues of concern to the individual and will offer practical everyday strategies to help.
- **Most Psychologists** will assess for cognitive profile with a *WAIS-IV* Test. If the verbal IQ is significantly higher than the non-verbal IQ, Dyspraxia **may** be 'indicated'. However the WAIS-IV was not designed as a diagnostic tool for dyspraxia/DCD so the psychologist may conduct additional tests and/or refer on to an Occupational Therapist for further assessment. A psychologist cannot give a diagnosis without the input of a medical professional.
- **Work place assessments** are available from specialist services such as Dyspraxia UK <http://www.dyspraxiauk.com/> and Key 4 Learning Ltd. <http://www.key4learning.com/> These assessments are not diagnostic but aim to analyse the work you do and help identify any difficulties you may be experiencing. (See our factsheet on Dyspraxia/DCD in the Workplace).
- Ensure you check costs with any professional and their individual qualifications. Ask about their experience with dyspraxia/DCD. You might request a sample report and check if any follow-up or coaching is available and included with the cost. A good relationship with your assessor is invaluable and could offer you occasional support for many years.

### Diagnosis: what next?

- An assessment should help identify your strengths and weaknesses, enabling you to identify and use strategies to improve your performance at home/education/work. This will help to reduce your stress/anxiety and promote your well-being.

- Dealing with a diagnosis can be an emotional and daunting process. There are many on-line chat groups for adults on Facebook, Twitter and YouTube including: Dyspraxia Foundation; Dyspraxia Foundation National Adult Support Group; Dyspraxia UK; Dyspraxia USA and many others. The Dyspraxia Foundation hosts a growing number of local adult support groups who organise social meetings which you may find beneficial.
- Celebrate dyspraxia! Being sensitive and creative, seeing the larger picture, thinking outside the box, caring for others, being loyal and persistent, and getting things done are fantastic assets!

### SUMMARY

- Diagnosis in childhood is ideal, but for those whose difficulties were not identified in childhood a 'late diagnosis' can be of benefit to an individual.
- There are times when having a diagnosis is especially useful such as before going to university or taking a job.
- Receiving a diagnosis might help you to make sense of your previous experiences and identify effective strategies to support your individual situation.

### Further information is available from

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