

The symptoms of Dyspraxia

By 3 years old

Symptoms are evident from an early age. Babies are usually irritable from birth and may exhibit significant feeding problems.

They are slow to achieve expected developmental milestones. For example, by the age of eight months they still may not sit independently.

Many children with dyspraxia fail to go through the crawling stages, preferring to 'bottom shuffle' and then walk. They usually avoid tasks which require good manual dexterity.

Pre-school children – 3 to 5 year olds

If dyspraxia is not identified, problems can persist and affect the child's life at school. Increasing frustration and lowering of self-esteem can result.

Children with dyspraxia may demonstrate some of these types of behaviour:

- Very high levels of motor activity, including feet swinging and tapping when seated, hand-clapping or twisting. Unable to stay still
- High levels of excitability, with a loud/shrill voice
- May be easily distressed and prone to temper tantrums
- May constantly bump into objects and fall over
- Hands flap when running
- Difficulty with pedalling a tricycle or similar toy
- Lack of any sense of danger (jumping from heights etc.)
- Continued messy eating. May prefer to eat with their fingers, frequently spill drinks
- Avoidance of constructional toys, such as jigsaws or building blocks
- Poor fine motor skills. Difficulty in holding a pencil or using scissors. Drawings may appear immature
- Lack of imaginative play. May show little interest in dressing up or in playing appropriately in a home corner
- Limited creative play
- Isolation within the peer group. Rejected by peers, children may prefer adult company
- Laterality (left- or right-handedness) still not established
- Persistent language difficulties
- Sensitive to sensory stimulation, including high levels of noise, tactile defensiveness, wearing new clothes
- Limited response to verbal instruction. May be slow to respond and have problems with comprehension
- Limited concentration. Tasks are often left unfinished

By 7 years old

Problems may include:

- Difficulties in adapting to a structured school routine
- Difficulties in Physical Education lessons
- Slow at dressing. Unable to tie shoe laces
- Barely legible handwriting
- Immature drawing and copying skills
- Limited concentration and poor listening skills
- Literal use of language
- Inability to remember more than two or three instructions at once
- Slow completion of class work
- Continued high levels of motor activity
- Hand flapping or clapping when excited
- Tendency to become easily distressed and emotional
- Problems with co-ordinating a knife and fork
- Inability to form relationships with other children
- Sleeping difficulties, including wakefulness at night and nightmares
- Reporting of physical symptoms, such as migraine, headaches, feeling sick

By 8 to 9 years old

Children with dyspraxia may have become disaffected with the education system. Handwriting is often a particular difficulty. By the time they reach secondary education their attendance record is often poor.