



Assessment and Diagnosis of Developmental Coordination Disorder (dyspraxia) in children

What is Dyspraxia (DCD)

Dyspraxia or as it is also known as Developmental Coordination Development (DCD) is a neurological condition which affects fine and gross motor skills and coordination. It does not affect intelligence but it can cause challenges in planning, processing information and instructions, organisation and time management.

Dyspraxia is different for everyone, with each person demonstrating their own strengths and challenges.

Symptoms of Dyspraxia (DCD)

Symptoms of dyspraxia (DCD) can vary in individuals and may change over time. Young children may not meet typical developmental milestones in walking, self-feeding and dressing. At school children with dyspraxia may have difficulty holding a pencil, writing, tying shoe laces and taking part in physical activities.

Although signs of the condition are present from an early age, children vary widely in their rate of development. This means that a definite diagnosis of dyspraxia (DCD) does not usually happen until a child is **five years of age or older**.

Dyspraxia should not be confused with other disorders affecting movement such as cerebral palsy and stroke. Although dyspraxia (DCD) is not an intellectual disability, it can affect people of all intellectual abilities.

If a person has dyspraxia (DCD) it may cause challenges in –

- Coordination, balance and movement
- Gross motor tasks requiring balance and coordination such as playing sports, cycling, skateboarding or driving a car
- Fine motor skills such as writing, tying shoe laces, or using objects such as scissors
- Implementing new skills
- Thinking and remembering information at work and home
- Daily living skills such as dressing, shaving or preparing meals
- Writing, typing, drawing and grasping small objects
- Social situations and dealing with emotions
- Time management, planning and personal organisational skills

Diagnosis

For a diagnosis of dyspraxia (DCD) to be made, your child will usually need to meet all of the following criteria:

- Motor skills are significantly below the age-appropriate level expected and opportunities they have had to learn and use these skills.
- Lack of motor skills significantly and persistently affects their day-to-day activities and achievements at school.
- Symptoms first developed during an early stage of development.
- Lack of motor skills cannot be explained by long-term delay in all areas (general learning disability) or rare medical conditions such as cerebral palsy or muscular dystrophy.

Dyspraxia(DCD) should only be diagnosed in children with a general learning disability if their physical coordination is significantly more impaired than their mental abilities.



Assessment

If you believe that your child may have dyspraxia (DCD) then the usual course of action is to register your child with your local HSE primary care team <https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/2/primarycare> for assessment and diagnosis. The current waiting lists are very long and vary between 18 months to 4 years in most regions. However, it is important that you still contact your local HSE primary care team and register your child with them even if you decide to pursue a private assessment as there is a possibility that you will be able to avail of further supports through your local HSE team at some stage in the future should your child receive a diagnosis.

If you decide to pursue a private assessment you can choose from a paediatric Occupational Therapist (OT), a neurologist, or a paediatrician. You can check services OT services in your region on the AOTI website <https://www.aoti.ie/ot-directory>

Dyspraxia/DCD Ireland employ a fully qualified Occupational Therapist (Stephen Hodnett) who can conduct assessments. We work with children and young people aged **between 5 and 21 years**. The assessment process is that the OT will conduct part of the assessment through speaking to parents and teachers and then conducting an in-person physical assessment with the child. Following this, you will receive a detailed report with outcomes and recommendations.

Our assessment for DCD will include:

- A thorough medical and developmental history
- Clinical examination
- Motor testing
- Questionnaires/Interviews
- Discussion with the child and parents and, if required, others such as teachers and other health professionals, regarding the impact of the child's motor skills on daily living skills, school, leisure and participation.

Further Information

- Dyspraxia (DCD) is a lifelong disability that cannot be 'cured' but can be managed to ensure that the person is enabled to lead a good and fulfilling life.
- Children and adults with dyspraxia (DCD) often self-develop a range of self-supporting strategies that led to a belief that they could 'grow out' of the condition. In reality, the vast majority of children will need long-term help and support to ensure that they are enabled to lead good and fulfilling lives.
- A formal diagnosis of dyspraxia (DCD) means that your child has been diagnosed with a recognised disability and is eligible to receive a range of services from the HSE and your child's school.
- If dyspraxia (DCD) has been diagnosed, a treatment plan tailored specifically to your child should be put in place with relevant service providers and schools. This plan may involve a range of specialist clinicians including occupational therapy, educational psychology, and physiotherapy.
- You can apply for Disability Carers Allowance for your child or, if they are aged over 16 years, they can apply for Disability Allowance in their own right.
- A child with a formal diagnosis of dyspraxia (DCD) is also entitled to receive 'reasonable accommodations' in school subjects and exams if they meet certain criteria.

For further information please have a look at some of our webinars on our YouTube Channel <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC7qg68PTFMujM5o4e9r5w2A/videos> and visit our website www.dyspraixa.ie or if you have a particular question please email us on info@dyspraxia.ie