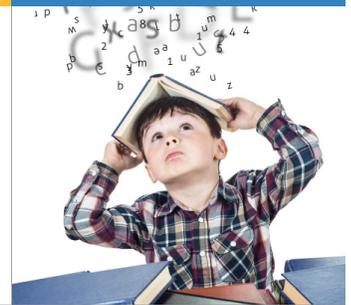


Health Tips for Parents

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Does my child have a learning disability?

Learning disabilities are neurologically-based processing difficulties in reading, writing and/or math that impact a child's ability to achieve at a level that would be expected for his or her developmental age and general abilities.



“The most common learning disability is difficulty in reading, also known as dyslexia. Reading disorders can be phonologically based where a student has a hard time sounding out letters or fluency based where a child has trouble rapidly accessing language based information,” says Talin Babikian, PhD, ABPP, UCLA clinical neuropsychologist, associate director of the UCLA Steve Tisch BrainSPORT Program.



A number of factors can cause learning disabilities – some are known and some unknown. Differences in the way the brain is “wired” in individuals with learning disabilities may be hereditary. In addition, developmental or medical factors – poor nutrition, exposures to toxins (in utero or during childhood), birth-related complications, neurological disorders, head injuries and some medical

conditions and medical treatments – may also put children at risk for developing a cognitive disorder, which can manifest as a learning disability.

A developmental evaluation looking at basic processing, language, motor and sensory skills can be obtained at any point (in the first year or toddler years) when parents or teachers notice that something may be off. Specific learning disorders can be evaluated in school-aged children. If there are red flags and concerns, the sooner the evaluation is done, the better, since this avoids a snowball effect that can negatively affect a student's self-esteem and motivation, which can be harder to treat than the learning disability itself.

An evaluation can help identify a true learning disability versus other factors, including anxiety, motivational issues or social and family issues.

Intervention and treatment options

- Involve a tutor, specialized teacher or educational therapist to work on phonics-based instruction or memory and attention strategies
- Offer extended test time, books on tape, testing in separate room, use of calculators or other helpful devices, rest breaks and shortened days
- Use medications to help with focus and attention or mood and anxiety, if warranted
- Request an evaluation and assistance from child's local school district to receive services



Support your child to learn

The more informed parents are, the better able they will be to provide timely and appropriate interventions to treat and address the learning problem, advises Dr. Babikian. Ignoring issues and attributing academic difficulties to laziness or lack of intelligence is a recipe for failure. Children with learning disabilities can be very successful in life with the right support and resources.

All health and health-related information contained in this publication is intended to be general in nature and should not be used as a substitute for a visit with a healthcare professional. **Subscribe to Health Tips for Parents at uclahealth.org/news.**