## What is Dyslexia?

The word ‘dyslexia’ comes from the Greek and means ‘difficulty with words’. It is a lifelong, usually genetic, inherited condition and affects around 10% of the population, 4% severely.

Dyslexia can also be acquired in certain instances. The primary type of acquired dyslexia is what is commonly called “trauma dyslexia”, meaning that some type of brain trauma caused the dyslexia, and it was not something that was present in childhood.

Dyslexia occurs in people of all races, backgrounds and abilities, and varies from person to person: no two people will have the same set of strengths and weaknesses. Dyslexia occurs independently of intelligence.

The British Dyslexia Association (BDA) describes Dyslexia as “a specific learning difficulty which mainly affects the development of literacy and language related skills. It is likely to be present at birth and to be life-long in its effects.”

It is characterised by difficulties with:

- **phonological processing** – which relates to how the brain is processing speech sounds and translating them into the written word for spelling, and vice versa for reading. It is a complicated process that includes breaking words into individual sounds, processing sounds at speed, remembering sounds in sequence and retrieving from long-term memory information relating to symbols.

- **rapid naming** - which taps into the ability to access and pronounce phonologically-stored information at speed. Research has shown an association between performance in rapid naming and literacy development.

- **processing speed** – refers to how fast the information travels through the brain. Dyslexics experience difficulties when required to process information at speed. A general weakness in **processing speed** causes difficulty in all processing areas. It is like having the brain work at 40 miles per hour when the rest of the world (and all the information) is going 55 miles per hour.

  Processing Speed affects: short-term memory (with time pressure), long-term retrieval (with time pressure), talking speed, word-finding, writing speed, reading speed, attention, reasoning (with time pressure), general response speed, ability to stay focused while reading, math-completing a series of problems, written language and writing speed. The student always feels ‘a step behind’.

All these deficits lead to lack of automatic development of skills that may not match up to an individual’s other cognitive abilities.

Dyslexia tends to be resistant to conventional teaching methods, but its effects can be mitigated by appropriately specific intervention, including the application of information technology.

**How it feels to be dyslexic...**

- ‘I see things from a different perspective.’
- ‘I can come up with solutions no one else has thought of and I think fast on my feet.’
- ‘When I am reading, occasionally a passage will get all jumbled up, but when it happens I have to read and re-read the passage over again.’
- ‘I know what I want to say, but I can never find the right words.’
- ‘In formal situations, although I know what I want to say, I struggle, lose focus and then my mind goes blank and I panic.’
- ‘I have the right ideas, but I can’t get them down on paper.’
- ‘It’s like my computer crashing with too much information!’
- ‘Sometimes when I am being told what to do, the words I hear get all jumbled up in my mind and I just can’t take in what is being said to me.’

Dyslexia is the most common of the Specific Learning Difficulties. It often co-occurs with related conditions, such as dyspraxia, dyscalculia and Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).

**The effects of stress** – research and self-reporting both concur that people with Dyslexia are particularly susceptible to stress, compared with the ordinary population, with the result that their impairments become even more pronounced.

As a result of their difficulties, many people with Specific Learning Difficulties have little confidence and low self-esteem

**Areas of strength** – dyslexic people often have strong visual, creative and problem solving skills and are prominent among entrepreneurs, inventors, architects, engineers and in the arts and entertainment world.

Many famous and successful people are dyslexic. Not all people with dyslexia and related difficulties will have outstanding talents, but all will have comparative strengths and often demonstrate great perseverance and determination.

Famous individuals with Dyslexia include: Einstein, Churchill, John F. Kennedy, Agatha Christie, Richard Branson, James Dyson, Sir Jackie Stewart, leading artists,architects (Lord Rogers), engineers, entrepreneurs, sportsmen (Sir Steven Redgrave), Mohammad Ali, and many more.

Full reference can be found in our Disability Learning Support Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLDs) booklet

**Useful link:**

Further information: NHS *Dyslexia*

All good practice guidelines are within the framework of the equality act 2010