

**Dyscalculia** is a condition that makes it hard to do math and tasks that involve math. It's not as well known or as understood as dyslexia. But some experts believe it's just as common. That means an estimated 5 to 10 percent of people might have dyscalculia.

There are different terms for dyscalculia. Mathematics learning disability is one. Mathematics learning disorder is another. Some people call it math dyslexia or number dyslexia. This can be misleading. Dyslexia is a challenge with reading. Dyscalculia is a challenge with math.

People don't outgrow dyscalculia. Kids who have a hard time with math may continue to struggle with it as adults. But there are strategies that can help them improve math skills and manage the challenges.

Difficulty with math happens at all levels. It can be as hard to learn addition as it is to learn algebra. Basic concepts like quantities can also be a challenge.

That's why dyscalculia can make it hard to do everyday tasks. Cooking, grocery shopping, and getting places on time all involve these basic math skills, which are known as number sense.

## Symptoms

People with dyscalculia can have trouble with math in different ways. Signs may vary from person to person. And they can look different at different ages.

Problems with number sense may show up as early as preschool in some people. In other people, the challenges become clear as math gets more complex in school.

Common signs of dyscalculia include trouble:

- Grasping the meaning of quantities or concepts like biggest vs. smallest
- Understanding that the numeral 5 is the same as the word *five*, and that these both mean five items
- Remembering math facts in school, like times tables
- Counting money or making change
- Estimating time
- Judging speed or distance
- Understanding the logic behind math
- Holding numbers in their head while solving problems

## Diagnosis

If your child has a hard time with numbers, see his doctor to rule out any vision or hearing problems that might affect his ability to learn.

Then talk to your child's math teacher to understand where he's having trouble. Also talk to other teachers to find out if he's struggling in other areas.

If you think your child may have dyscalculia after talking with his doctor and teachers, make an appointment to see a learning specialist. She'll talk with you and your child and test his math abilities to help determine if he has it. Testing is the only way to know for sure if your child has the condition. The test is sometimes called educational or psychosocial testing. The tests look at four main things:

- Computational skills: The ability to do math operations. Younger kids may get addition or subtraction problems, and older kids might get harder problems like multiplication, division, and fractions.
- Math fluency: The ability to easily recall basic math facts, like  $5 \times 3 = 15$ , or how to multiply fractions
- Mental computation: The ability to do math problems in your head
- Quantitative reasoning: The ability to understand and solve word problems

An expert can look at these tests and put together a report that can help you address the needs of your child.

## **Treatment**

Learning specialists, educational psychologists, or neuropsychologists who specialize in dyscalculia recommend the following to help a child's understanding of math:

- Specially designed teaching plans
- Math-based learning games
- Practicing math skills a lot more often than other students

## **How Can I Help My Child?**

Here are some things you can try to help your child better learn and understand math and lower her anxiety:

- Let her use her fingers and paper when she counts.
- Make sure she has the right tools, like an easy-to-use calculator and plenty of erasers.
- Use graph paper. It helps keep columns and numbers straight and neat.
- Use rhythm and music to teach math facts and steps.
- Get an experienced math tutor to help.
- Draw pictures of math word problems.
- Schedule computer time to play math games.
- Praise her hard work, not the outcome.
- Talk with her about her learning disability.
- Teach her ways to manage anxiety.

Talk to teachers privately about your child's condition and educational needs. You may want to ask for the following:

- A quiet work space
- Use of a calculator during math class and tests
- Extra time to complete tests
- The option to record lectures

