

Dyscalculia

What is dyscalculia?

Dyscalculia affects a person's ability to understand, recall or use numerical information. Some people may feel anxious when having to undertake any mathematics-related tasks and so may avoid situations where such tasks are involved, for example, paying bills or avoiding specific jobs. Dyscalculia can also affect the way numerical information is processed, meaning people may also have difficulty with memory, speed of thinking, organisation and sequencing.

It is estimated that up to half of all people with dyscalculia have some other neurological difference, such as dyslexia, dysgraphia, dyspraxia, autism or ADHD.



Skills and strengths

People with dyscalculia are likely to have a range of strengths in areas including:

- Verbal communication
- Problem solving and troubleshooting
- Creativity – they tend to be particularly creative artistically and linguistically
- Intuition - they tend to be good at analysing situations and display excellent judgement
- Lateral, strategic and big-picture thinking.

Potential challenges and difficulties

People with dyscalculia may experience difficulties in the following areas:

Mathematics skills

- Struggling with mental arithmetic and 'simple' mathematics tasks and experiencing a high level of mathematics anxiety
- Tending to be slower in performing calculations
- Confusing mathematical signs, for example '+', '-' or 'x', and formulae
- Difficulty interpreting charts or measurements
- Forgetting mathematical procedures
- Avoiding difficult tasks that are likely to result in them giving an incorrect answer.

Number skills

- Difficulty with recording numbers accurately
- Confusion with dialling telephone numbers
- Inability to understand financial information, for example, bills and budgeting
- Tending to misread and transpose numbers, for example, reading 117 as 171
- Difficulty reading long numbers, for example, telephone or bank numbers
- Confusing or forgetting pin codes and security numbers
- Difficulty with counting backwards.

Other difficulties

- Struggling to tell the time
- Difficulty with time management and reduced awareness of time passing
- Inability to estimate distance
- Difficulty with navigation and direction or confusing left and right
- Difficulty reading bus numbers or timetables
- Struggling with using and managing money and budgeting
- Difficulty with completing sequences of tasks in order.



Helpful tips for supporting someone with dyscalculia at work

Whether you have an employee, colleague or customer with dyscalculia, there are some simple things you can do to make their life easier and support them with some of the key areas they may struggle with.

Help with mathematical and data tasks

- Supply scrap paper for rough working
- Provide a handheld or speaking calculator
- Allow additional time to complete mathematics tasks
- Provide any figures to be discussed in meetings or training sessions in advance
- Set aside some 1:1 time after meetings or training sessions to review the material presented
- Present only essential data – remove all unnecessary words or figures
- Provide a written copy of figures
- Where possible, use visual representations, such as pie charts
- For calculations, suggest they write steps down and talk them through.

General use of numbers

- Provide support with remembering codes and passwords
- Consider using alternative passwords and codes that don't require numbers
- Set up speed dialling for regularly used telephone numbers
- Provide examples and templates for forms that involve the input of numbers.

Other strategies to consider

- Allow flexibility so that they can avoid working at busy times, to help their concentration
- Provide a quiet area for them to work in or place screening around their desk when working on tasks that they find particularly difficult, to reduce distractions
- Provide headphones to reduce noise distractions
- Support with navigation, perhaps allocating a buddy to travel with them when first visiting a new work location or client site
- Offer help with planning and prioritising
- Set alarms and alerts to help with timings.

Remember, the individual is the expert in their condition – if in doubt, check with them!