

What is Auditory Processing Disorder?

Some young children seem to have problems deciphering or decoding the sounds that make up language. Even though they have normal hearing, they miss a lot of the details of what's being said around them, especially in noisy or distracting environments. These children may have a condition called Auditory Processing Disorder, and that can interfere with both learning and interacting with other people.

It can affect people of all ages, but often starts in childhood. Each person is affected in a different way and to a different degree, so APD may be called a 'spectrum disorder'. Some children have a greater range of difficulties than others. The effect of APD can be worsened by the presence of other conditions, such as dyslexia, language processing difficulties, poor attention and poor short-term memory.

For many children, APD improves as they grow older and are able to incorporate effective strategies into everyday life. Many children go on to have successful school and work lives.

What causes auditory processing disorder?

The causes of APD aren't fully understood. Some cases in children may be related to having had glue ear or several ear infections when they were younger. These can result in the brain being 'wired' slightly differently also the message signals are passed on from cell to cell less effectively than usual. There may be a genetic component, as some cases seem to run in families.

Other conditions can affect children alongside APD including dyslexia, attention deficit with or without hyperactivity disorder and speech/language problems.

Things to look for:

Here are some behaviours you or your child's teacher might have noticed:

- Doesn't pick up nursery rhymes or song lyrics
- Has trouble following directions
- Doesn't remember details of what she's heard
- Appears to be listening but not hearing
- Often mistakes two similar-sounding words
- Has difficulty understanding speech in noisy environments
- Has trouble learning to read and spell
- Finds it hard to follow conversations
- Finds it hard to express himself clearly
- Frequently asks people to repeat what they've said

These are all behaviours that can indicate auditory processing problems, but they are also behaviours that can have other causes, so it is important to have proper assessment. Because these symptoms overlap with other disorders, auditory processing disorder cannot be diagnosed just from a checklist of symptoms.

Prevalence:

We are not sure how many children and young people are affected by APD, but estimates from around the world suggest between three and five per cent of children have APD to some degree.

Testing for auditory processing disorder:

Normal hearing tests aren't effective at diagnosing APD because they're usually carried out in a quiet room without distractions and don't test the ability to hear in a normal day-to-day listening environment.

More complex tests are needed to test the ability to hear with different levels of background noise, poor quality speech, people talking with different accents, and people talking quickly. These tests are carried out by Specialist Audiologists and you can be referred by your GP.

Treatments for auditory processing disorder:

There is normally no medicine or procedure that can 'cure' APD. However, there are several strategies that could reduce the effects of APD on everyday life. Training programmes, such as the Listening Program, FastforWord, or BrainBoy that address specific issues and can improve listening and concentration can be very effective if practised regularly. Personal FM devices can also make a difference in specific situations.

There are also some adjustments that can be made at school to make things easier, such as sitting near the front of the classroom, asking the teacher to check that your child is listening and back up verbal instructions with written ones., seating your child away from noisy equipment. Making adjustments at home can also be helpful, such as keeping background noise from the television or radio to a reasonable level. Asking your child to repeat back what you have said is also helpful.

If your child has other difficulties then treatment may be done alongside other therapeutic activities.

Further help and support

This information was taken from Great Ormond Street and the NHS websites plus www.childmind.org.

You will find checklists for APD at:

<https://www.chimehealth.co.uk/web/data/apd-booklet-clearing-the-waters-2.pdf>

<https://soniclearning.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Auditory-Processing-Difficulties-Observation-Checklist.pdf>