



What are developmental disabilities?

Developmental disabilities encompass a broad range of conditions that result from cognitive and/or physical impairments. They are identified before the age of 22, and usually last throughout a person's lifetime. These disabilities include intellectual disabilities, cerebral palsy, autism spectrum disorder, Down syndrome, language and learning disorders, vision impairment, and hearing loss.

What are the most common developmental disabilities?

The most common developmental disability is intellectual disability [see sidebar]. Cerebral palsy is the second most common developmental disability, followed by autism spectrum disorder. Other developmental disabilities may include:

- Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder
- Angelman Syndrome
- Bipolar Disorder
- Central Auditory Processing Disorder
- Down Syndrome
- Expressive Language Disorder
- Fragile X Syndrome
- IsoDicentric 15
- Landau-Kleffner Syndrome
- Learning Disabilities
- Neural Tube Defects
- Phenylketonuria
- Prader-Willi Syndrome
- Seizure Disorders
- Tourette Syndrome
- Traumatic Brain Injury
- Williams Syndrome

[OVER]

INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES

What are intellectual disabilities (ID)?

According to the American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, ID are characterized by significant limitations in both intellectual functioning (reasoning, learning, problem solving) and in adaptive behavior, which covers a range of everyday social and practical skills. This type of disability originates before the age of 18.

What are the causes of ID?

ID can be caused by any condition that impairs development of the brain before birth, during birth, or in the childhood years. Hundreds of causes of ID have been identified. However, for approximately one-third of those affected, the cause of their disability remains unknown.

Causes of ID include:

- Pregnancy/delivery problems (drugs, malnutrition, illness, prematurity)
- Early childhood diseases and accidents
- Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS)
- Exposure to toxins and other environmental health hazards
- Genetic anomalies and disorders

Can ID be prevented?

In recent years, significant advances in research have prevented many ID. For example, every year in the United States, thousands of cases of ID are prevented through newborn screening and dietary treatment, thyroid hormone replacement therapy, use of anti-Rh immune globulin to prevent Rh disease and severe jaundice in newborn infants, and Hib and measles vaccines.

What are the effects of ID?

Although developmental disabilities can cause difficulties with major life activities such as language, mobility, learning, self-help, and independent living, many people with ID grow up to lead independent lives. The remaining minority with ID, those with IQs under 50, have significant limitations in functioning. With early intervention, a functional education, and appropriate supports as an adult, however, individuals with ID can lead full and satisfying lives.

How prevalent are developmental disabilities?

Developmental disabilities occur in people of all racial, ethnic, educational, and socioeconomic backgrounds. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, approximately one in six children (or 15 percent of children under the age of 18) are affected. It is estimated that more than five million Americans have developmental disabilities.

How are developmental disabilities diagnosed?

If you are concerned that a member of your family may have a developmental disability—whether physical or intellectual—contact a respected behavioral healthcare organization and/or healthcare professional. First, the organization should have a qualified professional give your family member standardized intelligence and skills tests. Second, the professional should determine your family member’s strengths and weaknesses in the areas of intellectual and adaptive behavior skills, psychological and emotional considerations, physical health, and environmental factors. Finally, a trained interdisciplinary group of professionals should meet to determine what supports are needed to address each of the areas stated above.

What services are available to someone with a developmental disability?

After the specific needs of a person with a developmental disability have been evaluated, we recommended strategies, services, and supports to optimize individual functioning. Availability, eligibility guidelines, and funding of services will vary from state to state. These may include educational, residential, vocational, and day habilitation services. These services help individuals lead more independent lives in their communities.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES INCLUDE:

- ▶ Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (www.aamr.org)
- ▶ ARC of the United States (www.thearc.org)
- ▶ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (cdc.gov)

mayinstitute.org

May Institute is a nonprofit organization that is a national leader in the field of applied behavior analysis, serving individuals with autism spectrum disorder and other developmental disabilities, brain injury and neurobehavioral disorders, and other special needs. Founded more than 60 years ago, we provide a wide range of exceptional educational and rehabilitative services across the lifespan. The organization is one of the largest and most well-respected providers of services and special education schools for children and adults with autism and other special needs in Massachusetts and in the U.S.

For more information, contact May Institute at 800-778-7601 or info@mayinstitute.org.