



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, autism spectrum disorders, Down syndrome, language and learning disorders, cerebral palsy, vision impairment, and hearing loss.

How prevalent are developmental disabilities?

Developmental disabilities occur in people of all racial, ethnic, educational, and socioeconomic backgrounds. According to the National Association of Councils on Developmental Disabilities, 5.4 million Americans have developmental disabilities. Approximately 17 percent of children under the age of 18 are affected. The most common developmental disorder is intellectual disability.

What are intellectual disabilities?

According to the American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, intellectual disabilities 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 effects of intellectual disabilities?

While the effects and severity of these conditions can vary widely, people with developmental disabilities have problems with major life activities such as language, mobility, learning, self-help, and independent living. Intellectual disabilities in these individuals are often not identified until they enter school.

Many people with intellectual disabilities grow up to lead independent lives. The remaining minority of people with intellectual disabilities, those with IQs under 50, have significant limitations in functioning. With early intervention, a functional education, and appropriate supports as an adult, individuals with intellectual disabilities can lead satisfying lives.

What are the causes of intellectual disabilities?

Intellectual disabilities 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 intellectual disabilities have been identified. However, for approximately one-third of those affected, the cause of their disability remains unknown. Causes of intellectual disabilities include:

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

Can intellectual disabilities be prevented?

Significant advances in research over the past 35 years have prevented many intellectual disabilities. For example, every year in the United States, more than 10,000 cases of intellectual disabilities 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.

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 are the most common developmental disabilities?

The most common developmental disorder is **intellectual disability**. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, more than one out of every 100 school children in the United States has some form of intellectual disability. **Cerebral palsy** is the second most common developmental disorder, followed by **autism spectrum disorders**. According to First Signs, Inc., other developmental disorders include:

- Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)
- Angelman Syndrome
- Bipolar Disorder
- Central Auditory Processing Disorder (CAPD)
- Down Syndrome
- Expressive Language Disorder
- Fragile X Syndrome
- IsoDentric 15
- Landau-Kleffner Syndrome
- Learning Disabilities (LD)
- Neural Tube Defects
- Phenylketonuria (PKU)
- Prader-Willi Syndrome
- Seizure Disorders
- Tourette Syndrome
- Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)
- Williams Syndrome

What services are available to my family?

After the specific needs of a person with a developmental disability have been evaluated, we recommended strategies, services, and supports to optimize individual functioning. At May Institute, we provide a wide variety of programs and services for individuals and families affected by developmental disabilities. May Institute has programs in New England, the Southeast, and on the West Coast that provide educational, residential, vocational, and day habilitation services to individuals with autism spectrum disorders and other developmental disabilities. These services help individuals lead more independent lives in their communities.

Additional resources include:

- ▶ American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (www.aamr.org)
- ▶ ARC of the United States (www.thearc.org)
- ▶ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Administration on Developmental Disabilities (<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/add/>)
- ▶ Association of University Centers on Disabilities (www.aucd.org)
- ▶ Family Village (www.familyvillage.wisc.edu)

www.mayinstitute.org

May Institute is a nonprofit organization that provides educational, rehabilitative, and behavioral healthcare services to individuals with autism and other developmental disabilities, brain injury, mental illness, and behavioral health needs. Since its founding 55 years ago, May Institute has evolved into an award-winning national network that serves over 25,000 individuals and their families every year at more than 200 service locations in the Northeast, Southeast, and on the West Coast. The Institute operates several schools for children and adolescents with autism and other developmental disabilities. They are located in Randolph, West Springfield, and Woburn, Massachusetts; and Santa Cruz, California.

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