



BEYOND BIKE RIDING: THE OCCUPATIONAL IMPACT OF DYSPRAXIA.

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Dyspraxia, sometimes referred to as developmental coordination disorder or DCD, is often misunderstood and oversimplified as a condition that primarily impacts children. If we look beyond the typically reported difficulties with tying laces or riding a bike, we can see that dyspraxia impacts a wide range of meaningful occupations, for people of all ages, cultures and genders.

Dyspraxic children grow to be dyspraxic adults with an ever-evolving host of occupations that require a range of skills.

What is an occupation? The Royal College of Occupational Therapists reports that “occupation is any activity that we need, want or like to do, to live and to look after our physical and mental health, and our emotional and spiritual wellbeing. We do occupations from the moment we're born, on our own or with others. Occupation isn't just your job or activities of daily living”.¹

Typical occupations may include taking part in sports or joining in with peers during leisure time. We might see barriers to engagement here, such as challenges with physical skills, or avoidance of team sports due to fear of failure and negative social experiences. This often contributes to low self-esteem and social isolation.

26.3% of boys with probable DCD are overweight or obese, compared to 7.1% of boys without DCD²

“[He misses out] every day at school when all the kids have gone out to play and he takes five minutes longer to tie up his shoes.”³

“I look at friends skiing and ice skating and think that looks fun but could never think of joining in.” “I tend to choose to do physical activities on my own as I know I can't compete in team activities.”⁴



Everyday tasks such as household chores can be problematic. Often, individuals may choose to outsource or adapt these activities at a financial cost, which frees them from the frustration and allows them to focus on their strengths.

Ways of managing everyday chores may include using a laundry service, buying pre-chopped vegetables, ready meals, and using a handheld steamer instead of an iron. Baking, sewing and DIY can all be outsourced or adapted at a cost.

Learning to drive and navigating your community is often significantly more challenging. While some individuals may choose taxis or public transport, difficulty reading timetables, maps and following directions can prove problematic. Some may drive a manual vehicle, others an automatic and others not to drive at all.

“Because I consider myself a liability and wouldn't trust myself to be able to control the car, say, if there was a crash” ⁵

Time management and organisation can be highly impactful and often overlooked aspects of Dyspraxia. This includes difficulties telling or gauging time, packing bags or sequencing activities, which can make it difficult to stay on top of day-to-day activities.

The use of technology such as A.I., alarms, planners and apps may be useful.

Self-care for men and women can include showering, make-up application, shaving, nail care, facial hair grooming and hair styling. These activities require balance, bilateral integration (using both sides of the body together), spatial awareness, tactile and proprioception (touch and pressure) processing and effective sequencing. Often, individuals will forego non-essential tasks or outsource these, adding to the costs we have already mentioned.

Taking part in meaningful occupations is essential for well-being. It is not surprising then that where barriers exist, individuals may experience feelings of anxiety, inadequacy, otherness or low mood.

Considering what we know, professionals must understand the wider impact of dyspraxia throughout the lifespan and its effect on well-being and cardiovascular health. ^{6,7}

Remember

- It is okay to delegate, outsource and/or ask for reasonable adjustments.
- Focus on your strengths. A few of the many strengths associated with dyspraxia are creativity, loyalty and tenacity.

1. What is occupational therapy? (no date) RCOT. Available at: <https://www.rcot.co.uk/about-occupational-therapy/what-is-occupational-therapy#:~:text=An%20occupation%20is%20any%20activity,or%20activities%20of%20daily%20living> (Accessed: 06 October 2024).

2. Hendrix, C.G., Prins, M.R. and Dekkers, H. (2014) 'Developmental coordination disorder and overweight and obesity in children: A systematic review', *Obesity Reviews*, 15(5), pp. 408–423. doi:10.1111/obr.12137.

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6.Miyahara, M. et al. (2019) 'Experience of activity and participation of individuals with developmental coordination disorder/dyspraxia and their families and service providers', *JBIDatabase of Systematic Reviews and Implementation Reports*, Publish Ahead of Print. doi:10.1112/jbisrir-d-19-00212.

7. Gamba, L. et al. (2024) 'Excessive body weight in developmental coordination disorder: A systematic review and meta-analysis', *Neuroscience & Biobehavioral Reviews*, 164, p. 105806. doi:10.1016/j.neubiorev.2024.105806.