



## Understanding Neurodiversity

There are lots of different conditions that are considered neurodivergent such as ADHD, autism, dyslexia, dyscalculia and Tourette's Syndrome.

Each of the conditions is different and there is no one way to be neurodivergent. It's also possible to have multiple different conditions such as anxiety or depression.

Being neurodivergent means your brain works differently from neurotypical people. You may process things differently and become overwhelmed at times. Two people with the same condition may present with different traits and find they need more help in certain areas.

Some people may find they want extra help but some may be happy with just a diagnosis.

### **What conditions qualify as neurodivergent?**

Many different conditions qualify but the main ones are Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD), Autism Spectrum Disorder, Tourette's Syndrome, Dyslexia, Dyscalculia and Dyspraxia.

### **How do you get diagnosed?**

It will usually mean a trip to your doctor who will refer you or self-referring yourself to a specialist who is qualified to make a diagnosis. This may vary from country to country depending on how the healthcare system works.

Waiting lists for private and public health care can be a long wait. It is worth researching the condition to see if there is anything you can do to

make things easier for yourself while you are waiting to be diagnosed. This might mean wearing headphones in noisy situations if you are sensitive to sound or allowing yourself extra time to complete projects.

## **What treatments are there?**

Treatments are often the wrong word as people cannot be magically cured of neurodiversity - and lots don't want to be. However, there are some medications for conditions such as ADHD which are helpful for people or therapies that can help with more difficult traits. Some people also choose to take plant-based or alternative medicines such as medical cannabis or CBD if they find they prefer other options.

Some people may choose to have extra help from a carer or a coach. You can also ask for a reasonable adjustment in the workplace if you feel that you need them. This could be taking extra breaks if you struggle to sit still or asking for information to be presented differently.

## **Will this affect my daily life?**

It's impossible to say as each condition affects each person individually. While some may find they need a bit more help than others, being neurodivergent means you process things differently which may make your everyday tasks a bit harder.

Being neurodivergent can be exhausting as you use your brain to decipher how the world works. Things are often not set up or displayed in a way which is sympathetic to neurodivergent needs. This means you may have to work harder than neurotypical people to get process different things leading to exhaustion, overwhelm, meltdowns or burnout.

Assessing where you may need a bit more help or where you are struggling means you can find the best solutions to help you.

## **Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD)**

ADHD has had a lot of increased visibility on social media and in the media. Far from being a new condition, the increased awareness means

more people are recognising signs that they may have ADHD and are seeking a diagnosis which may have been missed when they were a child.

### *What is ADHD?*

Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD) is a neurological condition which means that people cannot regulate their attention. While it is commonly thought to be a lack of focus or associated with hyperactive boys, it can be an unbalanced attention span. Those with ADHD may be hyper-focused on a subject or item but be completely unfocused the next and they cannot choose when this happens.

### *What are the signs of ADHD?*

There are many different signs that someone may have ADHD and people can present very differently from each other. This is especially true if someone has more than one condition which may combine different traits.

Some of the common traits include: being unable to sit still, excessively talking, constantly fidgeting, being unable to concentrate, excessive physical movement, and acting impulsively. Although there are many others.

A person can have inattentive, combined or hyperactive ADHD. Inattentive ADHD can be classed as having a short attention span and being easily distracted, making mistakes, appearing forgetful or losing things. They may be unable to stick to tasks that they feel are boring or time-consuming. While hyperactive ADHD is thought to be can mean short attention span, restlessness, always fidgeting and acting without thinking. Combination ADHD is a mixture of the two.

### *How do I get diagnosed?*

There are two ways to get a diagnosis of ADHD but you will need to see a professional to get one. You can either go through the NHS, starting with a referral for a psychiatrist from your GP but be prepared to wait. There are lengthy waiting lists that often take years so while it's not impossible, you will need to be patient.

You can pay to go through the same process but privately. While this may mean faster timing than the NHS, it is a costly experience.

### *What is the treatment for ADHD?*

There are different drugs available through the NHS that are helpful for ADHD. The more common ones are Ritalin, Adderall, Concerta and Yvanse. You will need a doctor to prescribe these for you and it may be trial and error until you find the right match.

Some people find stimulant medications ineffective for them. This may mean searching for alternatives such as ADHD coaches or going on a herbal route with plant-based medicines or medical cannabis.

### *Three positive things to know about ADHD*

- Hyperfocus - Hyperfocus, when it happens, can be a godsend especially when it comes to workloads and making deadlines. A lot of ADHD people have more than one job because of their energy levels and focus.
- Creative - ADHD people can be incredibly creative as they see the world differently. Thinking outside the box comes naturally and they make incredible 'idea' people who can come up with unusual suggestions for problems or work.
- Spontaneous - ADHD people are often the life of the party thanks to their spontaneous nature. This can be incredibly fun to be around and intriguing.

### *What are three difficult parts about being ADHD?*

- Endless energy - It can often be difficult to stop and relax for ADHD people because of the amount of bigger amount of restless energy. This over time adds up and can be exhausting.

- Inattentive mistakes - Often ADHD people make small mistakes due to being inattentive or speedy. It can be upsetting, especially when it comes to workplace management.

- Hard time following instructions - It can be incredibly frustrating to follow instructions that are written for one neurotype.

ADHD people cannot force their brains to focus so it can mean zoning in, out and then becoming lost.

*What are common misconceptions about being ADHD?*

That all ADHD people are male - in the past, diagnostic practises have been based on men or boys. Girls are thought to present differently when it comes to ADHD which, if you are being measured against male traits, means that a diagnosis may be missed. There is also very little information out there for non-binary or transgender people seeking diagnosis which is something that needs to change.

## **Autism**

*What is autism?*

Autism means your brain works differently to neurotypical people. People are usually diagnosed at a very young age but not always as some traits may be easier to spot when a person gets older.

Different autistic people present differently so you may find while one person may hate social events, another may love them. Similarly, one person may be non-verbal while another may be very talkative. There is no one way to be autistic.

*What are the traits of autism?*

There are different traits but the most common are: finding it difficult to communicate, finding it hard to process how others think or feel, becoming overwhelmed in new or social situations, and finding bright lights or loud noises uncomfortable.

Autistic people may find social situations cause anxiety and they prefer to be on their own. Sometimes they may seem blunt or rude without meaning to and struggle to say how they feel.

### *How do I get diagnosed?*

There are two ways to get a diagnosis of autism but you will need to see a professional to get one. You can either go through the NHS, starting with a referral for a psychiatrist from your general practitioner but be prepared to wait. There are lengthy waiting lists that often take years so while it's not impossible, you will need to be patient.

You can pay to go through the same process but privately. While this may mean faster timing than the NHS, it is a costly experience.

### *What support is out there?*

There are often local support services that your GP can recommend if you need help with learning difficulties, pain, anxiety or other issues relating to autism. There are also peer-to-peer groups that you can join offering everything from social gatherings to talks and education on autism.

It is worth reaching out to see what support is out there.

### *Three positive things about Autism*

- Attention to detail - Autistic people are great at detail thanks to their deep focus and methodical approach. This can be a huge advantage in the workplace and projects.
- Creative thinking - Autistic people can be creative and take a unique approach to different tasks. This can lead to innovative and creative solutions to problems.
- Absorbing facts - Autistic people often have great long-term memory and can become completely fascinated by a task if they are engaged in it.

*What are three challenges about being autistic:*

- Avoidance - Autistic people may avoid situations that trigger anxiety or cause a sensory overload, disrupt their routines or mean changing from one activity to a different one.

- Overwhelming situations and meltdowns - A meltdown is a reaction to an overwhelming situation. It can happen as a result of someone becoming overwhelmed by their current situation and temporarily losing control of their behaviour. This can result in verbal reactions such as screaming or crying or physical where someone kicks or bites. It can also be a mixture of both physical and verbal reactions.

What to do if a person is having a meltdown - be kind, be patient, and be safe. Don't judge them, understand they may need some time and find a safe space for them where you remove the overwhelming factors. Anxiety blankets, headphones, and quiet spaces are all great ideas.

- Rigid routines: Autistic people may prefer to have a rigid routine that they can rely on. This helps to provide comfort while relieving stress and anxiety. It also avoids the need for unnecessary planning and helps with the transition from one task to another minimising the chance of becoming overwhelmed.

*What are the common misconceptions about being autistic?*

Amazingly, some people think that autism is a childhood condition that people can grow out of as they get older. Autism and neurological conditions are something that will be with you for life. Some people do get better at 'masking' as they get older where they learn a system or a way of doing things that helps them to cope with doing the task or social event or interaction better. This is not growing out of the condition and it can be exhausting.

# Dyslexia

## *What is dyslexia?*

Dyslexia is a learning difficulty that can affect a person's ability to fluently or accurately read or spell. Dyslexic people may struggle with verbal memory, verbal processing and phonological awareness.

## *What are the traits of Dyslexia?*

Dyslexic people may confuse words that appear similar or spell them erratically. They may find it difficult to skim-read text or write slowly. This may mean they need to re-read paragraphs to understand them fully. It might also be difficult for them to listen or maintain focus, especially if there are distractions.

## *How do I get diagnosed?*

A lot of Dyslexic people are diagnosed as children in school but not this isn't always the case. People will need different levels of help depending on their needs especially in school, university or the workplace.

It can be difficult to diagnose dyslexia as the symptoms may not always be obvious. Its recommended to have a Dyslexia Diagnostic Awareness test which can be carried out by an educational psychologist or qualified specialist.

Dyslexia testing is not covered by the NHS so the costs are usually covered by the patient or their guardians. This does mean you can self-refer and the waiting times may not be as long as the waiting lists for other conditions.

The test should examine your ability to read and write, language development and vocabulary skills. It will also look at memory and the speed you process information along with your approach to learning.

## *What support is out there?*

Dyslexia is a lifelong condition and there is no medication for it.



Some Dyslexic people choose to use different technology or apps to make reading or writing easier for them. Apps that can help with organisation are also a good idea.

Letting your employer know about your dyslexia if you feel able is a good idea. Your employer may be able to make reasonable adjustments to help you which will make a huge difference in your work life. This could be giving you verbal instructions instead of written ones or allowing you extra time to complete a task.

### *Three positive things about dyslexia*

- Great problem solvers - This comes from thinking outside the box when it comes to learning. Dyslexic people can often see new ways of completing tasks which are creative but get the job done.
- Narrative reasoning - Dyslexic individuals have a fantastic ability to learn through their experiences and recall information with greater efficiency.
- Creative imagination: A lot of artists, writers and creative minds are also dyslexic. Dyslexic people can make great use of their imaginations. They often have a keen sense of curiosity and interest which when combined with their imaginations makes some truly wonderful books, art or songs.

### *What are three challenges dyslexic people may have?*

- Difficulty taking notes: It can be stressful trying to keep up with note-taking in a busy meeting. Dyslexic people may need extra time or to be allowed to take different technology into a session. Even allowing someone to record and transcribe through apps helps to make things easier for someone who might be struggling.
- Avoiding reading or writing: It's common to avoid doing tasks like this as it would be too stressful especially if there are others in the room.

- Struggling to make deadlines: It can be really hard to meet strict deadlines if someone is struggling to write, plan or organise their thoughts. Dyslexic people may struggle to organise their work even if they are an expert on a subject due to difficulties with writing. It's worth asking for extra time and help if you need to complete something within a timeframe.

*What are the common misconceptions about being dyslexic?*

Dyslexics are often lazy when in fact, it's the opposite! A lot of dyslexic people are using their brains far harder to process information.

Much like the other neurodivergent conditions, this can make dyslexic people prone to exhaustion and burnout after a while.

## **Dyspraxia**

*What is Dyspraxia?*

Dyspraxia is a developmental coordination disorder that affects movement and coordination. This can affect a person's ability to do tasks that require balance such as sports or driving.

It can also affect skills such as writing or grasping small objects. A dyspraxic person may also find it difficult to learn new skills or regulate their emotions.

*What are the traits of dyspraxia?*

It can affect your coordination, balance and movement which can make it harder to dress or prepare a meal. Dyspraxic people may struggle with social situations, time management, planning or personal organisation. It may also be difficult to learn new skills or remember lots of information.

Many dyspraxic people also have other neurodivergent conditions such as ADHD or ASD. They may also have dyslexia or anxiety.

### *How do I get diagnosed?*

Your GP can refer you to a physiotherapist or occupational therapist (OT) for testing. This will include assessing your movements and talking through how your symptoms affect you. Recording your symptoms over time is a great way of being able to recall information if you struggle with remembering information. It also may reveal a pattern of behaviour or traits.

### *What support is out there?*

There is no cure for dyspraxia although some people find occupational therapy or cognitive behaviour therapies can work.

CBT therapists will be able to figure out different ways to address tasks while occupational therapists can help you with physical tasks such as learning to grasp or improving writing.

There are also support groups available for people with dyspraxia as it can be helpful to speak to others with the same condition.

### *Three positive things about dyspraxia*

- Thinking outside the box: Many dyspraxia people are very creative when it comes to finding alternative solutions - especially around learning new skills.
- Greater empathy: Dyspraxic people are known for being empathetic and also sensitive while having a greater understanding. They can often be extremely caring and compassionate to others which makes them a great friend or work colleague.
- Hardworking: Dyspraxic people are often very determined and motivated. When they decide they want to do something - they get it done!

*What are three challenges for dyspraxic people?*

- Poor motor skills: This may mean poorer performance when it comes to sports, increased clumsiness, and poor balance which may make riding a bike difficult.
- Poor spatial skills: this can result in a clumsy walk, bad posture or a person frequently bumping into things. They may also trip over a lot.
- Social and emotional difficulties: Dyspraxic people may have problems with communication along with low self-esteem or lack of confidence. This can result in frustration and defensiveness or increased anxiety or depression.

*What are the common misconceptions about being Dyspraxic?*

Although ADHD and Dyspraxia are similar - they are two very different conditions. One can often be misdiagnosed or mask the other so it is missed completely. It's also possible to have both conditions too.

## **Tourette's Syndrome**

*What is Tourette's Syndrome?*

Tourette's Syndrome is a condition that affects the nervous system. TS can cause people to have tics which are sudden movements, twitches or sounds. People with tics may do this often and cannot stop their bodies from doing this.

*What are the traits of Tourette's Syndrome?*

People with TS may have several different traits which are either physical or verbal or a combination of both.

Physical tics may include shoulder shrugging, blinking, jumping, eye-rolling, touching things or jerking movements.

Verbal tics may include grunting, whistling, repeating words or sounds, tongue clicking, swearing, throat clearing or coughing.

### *How do I get diagnosed?*

There's no single test for Tourette's syndrome. Tests and scans, such as an MRI scan, may be used to rule out other conditions.

You can be diagnosed with Tourette's syndrome if you've had several tics for at least a year.

### *What support is out there?*

There is no cure for TS but there are treatments that may help with controlling tics. This is usually behavioural therapy or medicine which can be prescribed through the NHS and your doctor.

### *What are three positive things to know about Tourette's Syndrome?*

- Energetic: People with Tourettes' are often energetic and can complete tasks they enjoy incredibly quickly.
- Creative thinkers: People with Tourette's Syndrome can be incredibly creative as they see the world differently. A lot of neurodivergent people are creative as they have had to learn to adapt or find alternative ways to do tasks.
- Verbal strengths: Small studies have shown that children with TS might have strengths when it comes to sounds and processing grammar.

### *What are three challenges for people with Tourette's Syndrome?*

- Tiredness: Some people with TS may be able to control their tics momentarily but it requires a lot of concentration. This can be tiring and some people may find they have a sudden release of tics afterwards.
- Embarrassment: Some people with TS may feel embarrassed about displaying tics in public especially if they are in new social settings.

- Oppositional defiance: This may include unintentional behaviours that are seen as explosive anger, blurting out, emotional outbursts, contextual swearing and inappropriate commentary.

*What are the common misconceptions about Tourette's Syndrome?*

People may assume that TS can frequently cause swearing. However, this isn't the case it is actually quite rare and is thought to only affect one in ten people with TS.

## **Dyscalculia**

*What is dyscalculia?*

Dyscalculia is a persistent difficulty in understanding numbers and math. It can be diagnosed at any age or education level. It may be the only condition that a person is diagnosed with or it can often accompany ADHD. It is also thought that 60% of those with dyslexia also have dyscalculia.

Some people may be born with dyscalculia while others can acquire it after a health issue such as a stroke, or head injury.

*What are the traits of dyscalculia?*

People with dyscalculia may struggle to remember basic facts, have poor arithmetic skills, may be slow to do or understand math, be unable to count backwards or have a poor sense of numbers. They may struggle with anxiety when they encounter numbers or mathematics.

*How do I get diagnosed?*

The first thing to do is to rule out possible other issues first with your doctor such as vision, mental health or hearing conditions. You may be able to see a professional psychologist who specialises in dyscalculia. There are screening tests you can book online or attend face-to-face.

### *What support is out there?*

Dyscalculia is a lifelong condition and there is no medication for it. Some people with dyscalculia choose to use different technology or apps to make understanding numbers or math easier for them. Apps that can help with organisation are also a good idea.

Letting your employer know about your dyscalculia if you feel able is a good idea. Your employer may be able to make reasonable adjustments to help you which will make a huge difference in your work life.

### *Three positive things about Dyscalculia*

- Intuitive thinking: People with dyscalculia may often find they have strengths in intuitive or strategic thinking which can make them very creative.
- Good public speakers: People with dyscalculia are often great at public speaking and find they can speak with ease even in stressful situations. They are often great problem solvers and good at thinking on their feet.
- Creative writers: People with dyscalculia may find they have a love of words and are often great at reading, writing and spelling.

### *What are three challenges for people with dyscalculia?*

- Mathematical mistakes: People with dyscalculia may make mistakes which can include number additions, substitutions, or omitting numbers, and they may struggle to recall numbers.
- Difficulty with time: People with dyscalculia may struggle with the concepts of time and direction. This may result in repeated lateness or getting lost.
- Difficulty with left and right orientation: This may contribute to a person struggling with driving or feeling anxious if they need to make a decision quickly.

*What are the common misconceptions about dyscalculia?*

Some people believe that dyscalculia is another name for maths anxiety when in fact they are two different things. Maths anxiety is classed as an emotional problem where people feel tense and apprehensive about math., This can affect a person's ability to do maths and solve mathematical problems both in life and academic situations.