

WHAT IS APD? © Alyson Mountjoy 2017

Auditory Processing Disorder or APD is an incurable, lifelong disability that affects the way that the brain processes sound including speech. It is thought to be caused by neurological damage and is therefore a medical disability not a learning difficulty - it causes them. Children with APD will become adults with APD, and depending on severity it can have enormous negative impact on all aspects of life, particularly education, communication, socialisation and relationships, and seeking and maintaining employment. Even those mildly affected will struggle.

APD is an invisible disability which can occur in people with perfect hearing or hearing loss. APD affects everyone uniquely and with varying severity, and it rarely exists in isolation - there are usually any number of other unrelated co-morbid conditions with reciprocal impact, which will also need diagnosis and support. APD even has some characteristics in common with other invisible disabilities, which makes it harder to spot, so misdiagnosis is common, or it is missed by being masked by these other difficulties. Recent US research has indicated that APD affects up to 5% of children worldwide, as well as many undiagnosed adults. APD is thought to be one of the main causes of dyslexia (what is known as auditory dyslexia, affecting acquisition of phonics discrimination - which can also affect speech, is caused by APD via the inability to accurately process and remember speech sounds/phonemes.)

APD affects everyone uniquely and with varying severity. It can affect people randomly and intermittently, with fluctuating effects even during one day or one hour. APD is often inherited and there are many other acquired causes, such as frequent ear infections leading to glue ear, head injury, brain damage from epilepsy, drug or alcohol abuse, damage in utero, effects from other conditions such as ME and Down's Syndrome etc. - and causes still unidentified. It can be acquired at any age and there are many adults with late onset APD due to illness or injury.

Accurate early diagnosis of APD is essential - and the leading centre of excellence in the UK is the APD Testing Centre at Great Ormond Street Hospital/GOSH in London. APD testing is currently undertaken there from age 7. But one centre of excellence for the whole UK is not enough - we need accessible, standardised testing UK wide. Diagnosis is just the start. Early diagnosis means that any intervention and development of coping strategies have a better chance of success the earlier they are implemented, before the auditory processing system of the brain is fully developed at age 12/13. APD cannot be cured, so you need to learn to live with it and get around it using coping strategies, utilising your own unique gifts and skills, learning style and strengths. Self advocacy skills are also vital for someone with APD - the ability to know how their unique pattern of APD affects them as an individual and how to ask for the unique accommodations that they need and are legally entitled to receive (and what to ask for). These accommodations are essential for a child with APD to be able to access an appropriate education. Also essential is acceptance by family and friends. APD is a disability for life and a child with APD will become an adult with APD. The sufferer will need to learn to live with APD, to get around it, but will still need lifelong support depending on its severity. To meet each individual's particular needs, uniquely tailored accommodations are a lifeline, at school and at work. APD also rarely exists alone, so further testing is needed, to identify every other condition that affects each child and impacts on the APD.

APD has been diagnosed in the UK since 2004; it is acknowledged as a recognised medical condition by the World Health Organisation and has a classification of the International Classification of Diseases (ICD) (which lists conditions too) - under the section ICD 9, as ICD-9 388.45 and ICD-9 388.40 and the Medical Subject Headings as MeSH D001308.

Sufferers of all ages need lifelong support at home, and accommodations in school/college/university, in seeking benefits, finding work and in the workplace. Some APD sufferers (both adults and children) are eligible to apply for ESA, PIP/DLA and Carer's Allowance where the effect on their lives is present most of the time and is substantial, and in some cases it can pose risks to safety in certain situations - and the CAB can advise on applications - yet APD is still not fully recognised and supported in the UK. In short - APD can be devastating to a child's education, communication, socialisation and future career prospects. It continues to affect adults throughout their life and affects all aspects of a person's life. It needs to be recognised as the often devastating disability that it truly is, and adequate help and support must be provided, as is the legal right of every child and adult in the UK - not to do so is disability discrimination and where there is failure to support at school, cases of educational negligence have been fought, and won. Please do your part in supporting those with APD.

For further APD information, printouts, links, alert cards, articles, and access to support groups, please visit: <http://apdsupportuk.yolasite.com/> and Great Ormond Street Hospital/GOSH APD page - <http://www.gosh.nhs.uk/medical-information-0/search-medical-conditions/auditory-processing-disorder>