

# What causes learning disabilities?




En Español 

Researchers do not know all of the possible causes of learning disabilities, but they have found a range of risk factors during their work to find potential causes. Research shows that risk factors may be present from birth and tend to run in families.<sup>1</sup> In fact, children who have a parent with a learning disability are more likely to develop a learning disability themselves.<sup>2</sup> To better understand learning disabilities, researchers are studying how children's brains learn to read, write, and develop math skills. Researchers are working on interventions to help address the needs of those who struggle with reading the most, including those with learning disabilities, to improve learning and overall health.

Factors that affect a fetus developing in the womb, such as alcohol or drug use, can put a child at higher risk for a learning problem or disability. Other factors in an infant's environment may play a role, too. These can include poor nutrition or exposure to lead in water or in paint. Young children who do not receive the support they need for their intellectual development may show signs of learning disabilities once they start school.<sup>3</sup>

Sometimes a person may develop a learning disability later in life due to injury. Possible causes in such a case include dementia or a [traumatic brain injury \(TBI\)](#) ([/health/topics/tbi](#)).<sup>4</sup>

## Citations

1. National Center for Learning Disabilities. (2017). *Snapshot of learning and attention issues in the U.S.* Retrieved August 7, 2018, from [https://www.nclld.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/1-in-5-Snapshot.Fin\\_.03142017.pdf](https://www.nclld.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/1-in-5-Snapshot.Fin_.03142017.pdf) ([https://www.nclld.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/1-in-5-Snapshot.Fin\\_.03142017.pdf](https://www.nclld.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/1-in-5-Snapshot.Fin_.03142017.pdf))  (PDF 187 KB)
2. Harstad, E. (n.d.). *Are the learning issues in my family genetic?* Retrieved August 7, 2018, from <https://www.understood.org/en/family/siblings/multiple-children-learning-issues/are-the-learning-issues-in-my-family-genetic> (<https://www.understood.org/en/family/siblings/multiple-children-learning-issues/are-the-learning-issues-in-my-family-genetic>) 
3. National Center for Learning Disabilities. (2014). *The state of learning disabilities: Facts, trends and emerging issues* (3rd ed.). New York: National Center for Learning Disabilities. Retrieved March 8, 2017, from <http://www.nclld.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/2014-State-of-LD.pdf> (<http://www.nclld.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/2014-State-of-LD.pdf>)  (PDF 6.1 MB)
4. National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke. (n.d.). *Dyslexia information page.* Retrieved March 8, 2017, from <https://www.ninds.nih.gov/Disorders/All-Disorders/Dyslexia-Information-Page> (<https://www.ninds.nih.gov/Disorders/All-Disorders/Dyslexia-Information-Page>)

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