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- Receptive language disorder

## Receptive language disorder

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### Also called

- Central auditory processing disorder

### Summary

- A child with receptive language disorder has difficulties with understanding what is said to them.
- The cause of receptive language disorder is unknown, but is thought to consist of a number of factors working in combination.
- Speech-language therapy is used to treat receptive language disorder.

A child with receptive language disorder has difficulties with understanding what is said to them. The symptoms vary between children but, generally, problems with language comprehension begin before the age of three years.

Children need to understand spoken language before they can use language to express themselves. In most cases, children with a receptive language problem also have an [expressive language disorder](#), which means they have trouble using spoken language.

It is estimated that between three and five per cent of children have a receptive or expressive language disorder, or a mixture of both. Another name for receptive language disorder is language comprehension deficit. Speech–language therapy is used to treat receptive language disorder.

## Symptoms of receptive language disorder

- There is no standard set of symptoms that indicates receptive language disorder, as it varies from one child to the next. However, symptoms may include:
- not seeming to listen when they are spoken to
- appearing to lack interest when storybooks are read to them
- difficulty understanding the meaning of words and sentences
- difficulty remembering all the words in a sentence in order to make sense of what has been said
- inability to understand complicated sentences
- inability to follow verbal instructions; especially if the instruction is long or complicated.

## Cause of receptive language disorder

The cause of receptive language disorder is often unknown, but is thought to consist of a number of factors working in combination, such as:

- genetic susceptibility (family history of receptive language disorder)
- limited exposure to hearing language in their day-to-day environment
- general developmental and cognitive (thinking) abilities.

Receptive language disorder is often associated with developmental disorders such as autism or Down syndrome. (Although for some children, difficulty with language is the only developmental problem they experience.)

In other cases, receptive language disorder is caused by damage to the brain, for example due to trauma, tumour or disease.

Receptive language disorder may also be related to:

- hearing impairment – due to decreased exposure to language
- vision impairment – due to the absence of cues such as facial expression and gestures
- attention disorders – due to difficulties in attending fully to what is being said.

## Diagnosis of receptive language disorder

Assessment needs to pinpoint the child's particular areas of difficulty, especially when they do not respond to spoken language. Diagnosis may include:

- hearing tests (by an audiologist) to check whether the language problems are caused by hearing impairment and to establish whether or not the child is able to pay attention to sound and language (auditory processing assessment)
- testing the child's language comprehension (by a speech pathologist) and comparing the results to the expected skill level for the child's age. If the child is from a non-English speaking home, assessment of comprehension should be performed in their first language, as well as in English, using culturally-appropriate materials
- close observation of the child in a variety of different settings while they interact with a range of people
- assessment by a psychologist to help identify any associated cognitive problems
- vision tests to check for vision impairment.

## Treatment for receptive language disorder

Treatment options for receptive language disorder may include:

- speech-language therapy (one-on-one or as part of a group, or both, depending on the needs of the child)
- providing information to families so that they can facilitate language growth at home
- special education classes at school
- integration support at preschool or school in cases of severe difficulty
- referral to a psychologist for treatment (only if there are also significant behavioural problems).

A child's progress will depend on a range of individual factors, such as whether or not brain injury is present.

## Symptoms of expressive language disorder

A child with receptive language disorder may also have expressive language disorder, which means they have difficulties with using spoken language. Symptoms differ from one child to the next, but can include:

- frequently grasping for the right word
- using the wrong words in speech
- making grammatical mistakes
- relying on short, simple sentence construction
- relying on stock standard phrases
- inability to 'come to the point' of what they're trying to say
- problems with retelling a story or relaying information
- inability to start or hold a conversation.

## Where to get help

- Your GP
- [Speech pathologist](#)
- [Audiologist](#)
- [Speech Pathology Australia](#) Tel. (03) 9642 4899
- Your maternal and child health nurse.

### References

- *Late blooming or language problem?* American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, USA. [More information here.](#)
- *Preschool language disorders*, American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, USA. [More information here.](#)

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[Everyone's immunisation needs are different and are influenced by your health, lifestyle, age and occupation...](#)

- [Parenting services](#)

[Parenting is one of the most important tasks we undertake but it doesn't always come naturally...](#)

## **Growth and development**

- [Child development \(7\) - three to four years](#)

[Your child is starting to understand social skills like sharing and being kind, but they can only practise these skills for a short time while feeling safe and happy...](#)

- [Children's feet and shoes](#)

[A child learning to walk receives important sensory information from the soles of their feet, and shoes can make walking more difficult...](#)

- [Dyslexia](#)

[Dyslexia is a type of specific learning difficulty \(SLD\) in which the person has difficulties with language and words...](#)

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[Growing pains may cause a lot of pain but they are harmless and can respond to simple treatments...](#)

- [Growth and development - primary school children](#)

[Always see your doctor if you are concerned about your child's growth or weight...](#)

- [Growth charts for children](#)

[Babies and young children do not usually grow in a perfectly smooth way, but instead grow in 'bursts'...](#)

- [Growth hormone](#)

[Some athletes and bodybuilders wrongly believe that taking synthetic growth hormone will help build up their muscles...](#)

- [Immunisation history statements for children](#)

[By law, parents or guardians must provide an Immunisation History Statement when enrolling children in any childcare service, kindergarten or primary school in Victoria...](#)

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[If your child is naturally left-handed, don't try to force them to use their right hand...](#)

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[Adjusting to the many changes that happen around puberty can be difficult for both parents and young people...](#)

- [Teeth development in children](#)

[Teething symptoms are common in children and can be managed without medications...](#)

## **Behaviour and learning**

- [10 tips for managing sibling rivalry](#)

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- [10 tips to prepare your child for high school](#)

[Visit the school before the school year starts ... 10 tips to prepare your child for high school...](#)

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- [Children and literacy](#)

[Your child is literate if they know how to speak, read and write their language with confidence...](#)

- [Children and shyness](#)

[If your child's shyness is especially debilitating, you may like to consider professional help from a counsellor or psychologist...](#)

- [Children and sibling rivalry](#)

[Sibling rivalry is a common problem, particularly among children who are the same sex and close together in age...](#)

- [Conduct disorder](#)

[Children with untreated conduct disorder are at increased risk of problems including substance use, personality disorders and mental illnesses...](#)

- [Cyberbullying \(online bullying\)](#)

[Cyberbullying \(or online bullying\) happens when technology is used to bully someone...](#)

- [Discipline and children](#)

[Disciplining your child means teaching them responsible behaviour and self-control...](#)

- [Expressive language disorder](#)

[Expressive language disorder means that a child has difficulty with verbal, written or other information...](#)

- [Left-handedness](#)

[If your child is naturally left-handed, don't try to force them to use their right hand...](#)

- [Oppositional defiant disorder \(ODD\)](#)

[Oppositional defiant disorder is a childhood behavioural problem characterised by constant disobedience and hostility...](#)

- [Peer pressure](#)

[Peer groups can be a very positive influence on your teenager's life...](#)

- [Receptive language disorder](#)

[Receptive language disorder means the child has difficulties with understanding what is said to them...](#)

- [Sleep - children and nightmares](#)

[Your child may have only a few scary dreams a year, or be troubled by nightmares much more often...](#)

- [Young children and communication](#)

[Children thrive with words of encouragement and praise...](#)

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- [Body image and diets](#)

[Some people diet because they have a poor body image, not because they want to be a healthy weight...](#)

- [Breakfast](#)

[Children who skip breakfast may lack sufficient vitamins and minerals including iron, calcium, zinc and vitamin B2...](#)

- [Childcare and healthy eating](#)

[Childcare centres should provide healthy meals for your children...](#)

- [Children's diet - fruit and vegetables](#)

[If you eat and enjoy fruit and vegetables every day, your child may eventually follow your lead...](#)

- [Eating tips for preschoolers](#)

[Children are able to decide how much food they need for activity and growth if allowed to eat according to their appetite...](#)

- [Eating tips for school children](#)

[Snacks are an important part of a healthy diet for active children, so offer nutritious as well as high energy snacks...](#)

- [Food for sport - tucker talk tips](#)

[Carbohydrate is the most important nutrient for athletes...](#)

- [Healthy eating – school lunches](#)

[Simple ways to make your child's school lunch healthier...](#)

- [Healthy eating tips](#)

[A good balance between exercise and food intake is important to maintain a healthy body weight...](#)

- [Lunch boxes - healthy ideas](#)

[Healthy foods that are great for school lunch boxes...](#)

- [Lunch boxes - healthy shopping ideas \(video\)](#)

[Victorian State Public Health Nutritionist Veronica Graham takes us shopping for the right foods to include in your child's lunchbox...](#)

- [Lunch boxes - how to make them healthy \(video\)](#)

[Victorian State Public Health Nutritionist Veronica Graham shares three healthy and delicious lunchbox examples for the kids and provides some great food preparation tips to save you time throughout...](#)

- [Lunch boxes - menu planner](#)

[By planning ahead, you can make sure that your child's lunch box has each of the six key elements of a healthy lunchbox...](#)

- [Lunch box tips](#)

[Encourage children to help choose and prepare their own healthy snack or lunch...](#)

- [Soft drinks, juice and sweet drinks - children](#)

[Encourage children to drink and enjoy water. Sweet drinks such as juice, cordial and soft drinks may cause health problems for children if consumed in large amounts...](#)

- [Sticking to New Year's resolutions](#)

[New Year's resolutions and how to stick to them...](#)

- [Vegetarian diets and children](#)

[Children can eat a vegetarian diet and stay healthy as long as their extra nutritional needs are met...](#)

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[A young child is naturally active, so build upon their inclinations to use their body...](#)

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[Carbohydrate is the most important nutrient for athletes...](#)

- [Gardening for children](#)

[Children can learn new skills, have fun and develop self-confidence when they grow their own plants...](#)

- [Healthy active Koori kids - tucker talk tips](#)

[Good nutrition and physical exercise help to keep Koori kids healthy and avoid diseases when they get older...](#)

- [Parent's guide for active girls](#)

[Physical activity is an important part of health and wellbeing, and girls should remain active as they grow up...](#)

- [Sport and children](#)

[Make sure that some family outings offer opportunities for physical activity, such as playing sport together...](#)

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## Managing weight

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[Once children are overweight, it takes a lot of effort for them to return to a healthy weight...](#)
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- [Pain management \(acute\) - children](#)  
[If you think your child is in pain, always see your doctor for diagnosis and treatment...](#)

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- [Body image and young people - staying positive \(video\)](#)

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- [Body image – tips for parents](#)

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[Understanding asthma triggers for your child can help to reduce the risk of an asthma attack...](#)

- [Back pain in children](#)

[Children with back pain may grow into adults with chronic bad backs, so it is important to encourage sensible back care...](#)

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[Bedwetting is a problem for many children and punishing them for it will only add to their distress...](#)

- [Children and vomiting](#)

[Mild vomiting is normal in most babies and improves over time...](#)

- [Constipation and children](#)

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- [Pinworms](#)  
[Despite the unsavoury reputation, a pinworm infection \(worms\) is relatively harmless and easily treated...](#)

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[Call the Poisons Information Centre on 13 11 26 immediately if you suspect your child has been poisoned or given the wrong medicine or the wrong dose of medicine...](#)
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- [Language disorders aphasia, Royal Children's Hospital, Melbourne.](#)
- [Late blooming or language problem? American Speech-Language-Hearing Association.](#)
- [Preschool language disorders, American Speech-Language-Hearing Association.](#)
- [Specific Language impairment, NIDCD: National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders.](#)
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Location:

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**This page has been produced in consultation with and approved by:**

La Trobe University - School of Allied Health - Speech Pathology

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