SANTA CRUZ
EAR, NOSE & THROAT
MEDICAL GROUP

Auditory Processing Disorders

Auditory processing is a term used to describe what happens when your brain recognizes and interprets the sounds around you. Auditory processing disorders (APD) are a deficit in the information processing part of the brain, rather than a loss of hearing ability--or in other words, what you do with what you hear. While you or your child may not have deficits attributed to hearing or intelligence, difficulties in the cognitive processes of hearing may stem from a mild dysfunction in the brain. These problems are more likely to occur when a person with APD is in a noisy environment or when he or she is listening to complex information.

Symptoms can range from mild to severe and take many different forms. People with auditory processing difficulty typically have normal hearing and intelligence. The most common signs of APD include unusual sensitivity to or distraction caused by noise; upset caused by noisy environments, with performance improving in more quiet settings; a tendency to "ignore" a speaker, especially when engrossed in something else; inability to remember multi-step directions; a prevalence of careless mistakes; perception of speech sounds as distorted; poor attention; confusion of certain words or groups of words; and difficulties in communication, reading, spelling, or writing.

It is generally accepted that no one test is sufficiently sensitive to evaluate all APD problems. The selection of tests is based on a number of factors, including age, specific difficulties displayed and cognitive status. In children, auditory processing difficulty may be associated with conditions such as dyslexia, attention deficit disorder, autism, autism spectrum disorder, specific language impairment, pervasive developmental disorder, or developmental delay. Sometimes this term has been misapplied to children who have no hearing or language disorder but have challenges in learning.

Management strategies for APD involve making alterations to the environments that evoke the symptoms. For example, classroom management strategies could help significantly. These may involve teachers providing more visual material, making acoustic modifications, reseating a troubled student, or speaking more clearly. Assistive listening devices are also an option. Therapy teaching auditory attending skills, auditory memory enhancement, language-building skills, visualization, note taking, etc., may also be helpful.

For more information:

American Academy of Audiology, www.audiology.org
American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, www.asha.org