



# CAN YOU HELP WITH DYSLEXIA AT HOME?

Could a simple eye test, diet and exercises help kids with dyslexia learn to read?

Across the nation, satchels are being packed in readiness for the new school year. But for children with dyslexia, the pleasure of seeing friends is often outweighed by fear of the classroom. Now a controversial new theory

- One in 10 children are diagnosed dyslexic, and one in five leave school unable to read.
- Dyslexia isn't just about illiteracy. Dyslexic children also have problems with information itself, from processing it to storing it.
- Dyslexia is more common in boys than girls. It has no impact on intelligence.
- Experts agree dyslexia is a brain-based condition, but the exact cause remains a matter of debate.

claims we're looking at dyslexia in the wrong way. It's commonly diagnosed alongside other conditions, such as dyspraxia (poor coordination) and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). But developmental specialist and author Robin Pauc believes these overlapping syndromes all stem from the same brain 'glitch'. 'These problems never appear on their own,' he says. 'Instead of looking at them individually, we should see them as symptoms of a wider developmental delay with a common cause.' A cause, he believes, that can be treated with nutrition

and brain-boosting exercises. He also thinks problems with eye convergence – the ability to move the eyes together while scanning text – is a huge factor in reading problems. He's carrying out research in schools, and campaigning for kids with early reading difficulties to be tested. 'It can be treated effectively with vision exercises,' he says. Despite being unorthodox, Robin's work has a devoted following among parents. 'I know some people are sceptical,' says Robin. 'But in my view, it's an effective, drug-free therapy that could save our schools millions.'

## THE SMARTER DIET

### Tips from the Brain Food Plan to nourish young minds

- Start every day with a healthy cooked breakfast, with good sources of protein, eg, eggs, beans or salmon. This keeps kids' blood-sugar levels stable, essential for children with a developmental delay. Sugary cereals are a disaster for concentration.

- Avoid meals that are heavy in processed carbs, such as white-bread sandwiches or white pasta – switch to wholegrains instead. And include healthy proteins too to avoid sugar slumps.

- Read food labels and cut out any sugary foods and those that contain artificial additives and sweeteners.

- Omega 3 fats can help kids with developmental delay, but for full benefits it's vital to also minimise saturated and trans fats (these bad fats 'push' good fats out). Fish oil pills are rich in omega 3, but choose supplements higher in EPA than DHA, as this is more helpful for behaviour problems.

# 'I'M A TEACHER – SO WHY COULDN'T MY SON READ?'

Gilli MacGregor, 43, didn't know what to do when son Kieran struggled with his dyslexia

**A**s a secondary school teacher, I'm only too aware of how devastating dyslexia can be for children. I've seen bright kids become completely demoralised by the fact they cannot read. They fall further and further behind their peers, and it's common to leave school with no qualifications. It's a scenario no parent wants for their child. So when it emerged that my own son, Kieran, now 10, was struggling to read, I was fearful for his future.

He was diagnosed aged seven with dyslexia and dyspraxia, and I was shocked by how little help there was. While his reading was down on the fifth percentile, his IQ was on the 85th percentile, so he wasn't considered far enough behind to warrant extra support at school. In fact, the disparity between his intelligence and his academic performance only added to his frustration – Kieran was bright so he knew he "should" be able to do all the things his friends could.

At school he went under the radar. In a class of 33 kids, he became adept at simply "disappearing", sitting quietly and staring out the window. At one parents' meeting, I was very upset to be told:

"Your son is lazy." I knew he wasn't, he just didn't want his classmates to know he couldn't read. Last year we

reached the point where Kieran didn't want to go back to school. It didn't matter how many times I told him to just do his best. He saw it as torture. Then I heard from a friend about a programme that had helped a colleague's dyslexic son. I'm no advocate of "alternative" therapies, but we were getting nowhere with the usual avenues.

**'One year on, Kieran can read anything his friends can, and that fills him with confidence'**

Robin Pauc prescribed a brain-boosting diet, home computer exercises to teach Kieran's eyes to converge properly, and physical exercises to stimulate

specific areas of the brain. It sounded wacky – for instance, he had to shut his eyes while walking up and down steps.

To be honest, I was sceptical. For the vision exercises Kieran wore special glasses and had to "zap" images on the computer once his eyes had focused: a bit like "magic eye" pictures. Kieran found it extremely challenging; it took him nearly six months to master. Bribery was involved. But by the end, I could see a tangible change in Kieran. His

teachers reported an improvement in his concentration. Of course, that could just be him maturing. But what convinces me that this programme really works is Kieran's reading. At the start of the programme he was 2.7 years behind. Today his reading is age-appropriate.

At the start of the last school year, I thought Kieran would still be unable to read by the time he started secondary school. One year on, he can read anything his friends can, and that fills him with confidence. His dyslexia isn't magically cured – his handwriting still needs help, for instance – but he says words on a page just make sense to him now. For the first time in years, I'm looking forward to Kieran starting a new year at school. And most importantly, so is he.'



Gilli is so glad she and son Kieran persevered with Robin's programme