Deficits in Attention and Motor Perception (DAMP)

Community Paediatrics
Deficits in Attention and Motor Perception (DAMP)

DAMP is a developmental disorder which can significantly affect how a child performs academically and socially. Research has shown that 3-6% of all children have DAMP.

DAMP is what we call a spectrum disorder. Some children only have mild problems, whilst others have severe problems. DAMP is found more in boys than in girls. DAMP does not mean that a child is not intelligent. However the child may need extra help to achieve their potential.

There are two primary areas of difficulty in DAMP.

1. **Attention Deficit**

This means that a child has difficulty concentrating in all situations. There may also be associated problems with hyperactivity and impulsivity, and children with this combination would be considered to have Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) as part of their DAMP diagnosis.

Children with attention deficit are often unable to sit still or concentrate on an activity. They tend to be easily distracted and fail to see tasks through to the end.
2. Motor Perception Difficulties

These are also known as developmental coordination difficulties or dyspraxia. These children have problems with the coordination of actions. This can include tasks requiring fine coordination, other motor skills or speech sound coordination. For example, the child may find it difficult to learn complicated actions such as threading, using scissors, pedalling and catching. These children appear clumsy and may collide with things. Later they can have difficulties with lots of skills like writing, shoelaces and buttons but also riding a bike or PE. These children can also have problems with the understanding and processing of information that they see and hear.

Pragmatic Disorder

Some children with DAMP may have other problems that are related to how they use and understand language to communicate. This may cause problems with social interaction and classroom learning. We refer to this as DAMP with Pragmatic Disorder (DAMPPD), and children with this diagnosis often show similar patterns of development to Autistic Spectrum Disorders/Conditions. This may become more noticeable with time.
The speech and language difficulties can show in two ways:

**Speech** problems, with difficulty in producing speech sounds. This often has to do with motor problems and difficulty in moving mouth and tongue into the right position to make a certain sound. The child may also have problems adjusting volume or pitch of their voice.

**Language** difficulties. These are often so-called pragmatic language difficulties: the child has difficulty understanding what people mean, including the use of body language. The child may have problems making sense of what is said, or they may have problems imagining/appreciating the thoughts and feelings of others.

**Cause**

No specific cause for DAMP has been found so far. DAMP does sometimes seem to run in families and if one twin has DAMP the other twin is more likely to have DAMP too, although different family members may have different severity of the problems. This suggests that genetic factors are important.
Development and changes over time

Over time the problems of children with DAMP change. Most children are diagnosed with DAMP in pre-school or the first years in primary school. Pre-school children with DAMP tend to be hyperactive and inattentive. They also have coordination problems but these may often not be noticed because of the hyperactivity. Two thirds of the children with DAMP in this age group have speech and language difficulties.

Primary school children with DAMP often have problems in school. They find it difficult to achieve their potential and need extra support for this. Especially the difficulties with concentration and handwriting cause problems in school. The pragmatic problems can also cause problems with peer relationships, leading to difficulties in making and keeping friends – this problem may dominate and may then be thought of as Aspergers. When the ADHD type problems dominate some children benefit from specific medication.

In adolescence and secondary school there is often some improvement in the motor skills. The clumsiness becomes less noticeable but children do remain easily distractible. This means that they may need ongoing support in the school environment.
Treatment and support

Unfortunately there is no cure for DAMP, but with the right support children with DAMP can achieve their potential both in school and at home.

Every child is different and it is important to find out where the problems in your child lie, so that the child can get support in those specific areas. It is important that teachers and other people closely involved with your child know about your child’s problems. With support your child is likely to do much better and to adjust better then without it.

Both you as parents and the school can do things to help your child focus. The advice that we give for this is the same advice we give for children with ADHD and will not be discussed in this leaflet.

For the motor problems it can be useful for the child to be seen by an occupational therapist or a physiotherapist. The occupational therapist can sometimes provide tools and advice on managing fine motor tasks.

The motor skills and balance can be trained. It is important to encourage physical activities like swimming. An activity like trampolining (in a safe environment) is also a good way to improve balance and muscle strength.

The pragmatic and language skills respond to the same type of approaches as are used for Autistic Spectrum Conditions.
Sources of help and information

More information on DAMP is available on mindroom:

http://mindroom.org/learning-difficulties/damp/.

Practical information and help on how to deal with the motor problems is available from the Dyspraxia Foundation:

http://www.dyspraxiafoundation.org.uk

Further information on related conditions including ADHD is available from:

http://www.cafamily.org.uk

Information on Autistic Spectrum Conditions is available from:

http://www.nas.org.uk
For further information about this service contact:

Community Paediatrics
Integrated Children's Services
Oak Tree Centre
1 Oak Drive
Huntingdon PE29 7HN

Tel No: 01480 418600

If you require this information in a different format such as in large print or on audio tape, or in a different language please contact the service on the details above.

If you have any concerns about this service or suggestions for improvements, contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service on Freephone 0800 013 2511 or email: ccs-tr.pals@nhs.net.

For free, confidential health advice and information 24 hours a day, 365 days a year please contact NHS 111.