

What is mental retardation?

According to the American Association on Mental Retardation (AAMR), mental retardation is a disability that is characterized by significant limitations both in intellectual functioning and in adaptive behavior as expressed in conceptual, social, and practical skills. Mental retardation originates before the age of 18.

How prevalent is mental retardation?

Mental retardation can occur in people of any racial, ethnic, educational, and socioeconomic background. A number of studies concluded that 2.5 to 3 percent of the general United States population has mental retardation. In other words, approximately eight million people have mental retardation.

What are the causes of mental retardation?

Mental retardation can be caused by any condition that impairs development of

the brain before birth, during birth, or in the childhood years. While hundreds of causes have been discovered, the cause remains unknown in approximately one-third of the people affected. Causes of mental retardation include:

- Pregnancy/delivery problems (drugs, malnutrition, illness, prematurity)
- Early childhood diseases and accidents
- Exposure to toxins and other environmental health hazards
- Genetic anomalies and disorders

How is mental retardation diagnosed?

If you are concerned that a member of your family may have mental retardation, contact a respected behavioral health-care organization. First, the organization should have a qualified professional give your family member standardized intelligence and skills tests. Second, the professional should determine your family member's strengths and weaknesses

in the areas of intellectual and adaptive behavior skills, psychological and emotional considerations, physical health, and environmental factors. Finally, a trained interdisciplinary team should meet to determine what supports are needed to address each of the areas stated above.

What are the effects of mental retardation?

The effects of mental retardation vary widely. The majority of people with mental retardation are only slightly slower than average in learning new information and skills. Mental retardation in these individuals is often not identified until a child enters school, and many grow up to lead independent lives.

The remaining minority of people with mental retardation, those with IQs under 50, have serious limitations in functioning. With early intervention, a functional education, and appropriate supports as an adult, many can lead satisfying lives in their community.

What services are available to my family?

After the specific needs of a person with mental retardation have been evaluated, strategies, services, and supports are recommended that will optimize individual functioning. At May Institute, we provide a wide variety of programs and services for individuals and families affected by mental retardation. May Institute has programs throughout New England and the Southeast that provide residential, vocational, and day habilitation services to individuals with mental retardation, autism, and other developmental disabilities. These services help individuals to lead more independent lives in their communities.

Can mental retardation be prevented?

During the past 30 years, significant advances in research have prevented many cases of mental retardation. For example, every year in the United States, more than 10,000 cases of mental retardation are prevented through newborn screening and dietary treatment, thyroid hormone replacement therapy, use of anti-Rh immune globulin to prevent Rh disease and severe jaundice in newborn infants, and Hib and measles vaccines.

Additional resources include:

American Association on Mental Retardation (www.aamr.org); ARC of the United States (www.thearc.org); ARC Massachusetts (www.arcmass.org); President's Committee on Mental Retardation (www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/pcmr); Massachusetts Department of Mental Retardation (www.mass.gov/dmr); Association of University Centers on Disabilities (www.aucd.org); Family Village (www.familyvillage.wisc.edu).

www.mayinstitute.org

May Institute is a nonprofit organization that provides educational, rehabilitative, and behavioral healthcare services to individuals with autism and other developmental disabilities, brain injury, mental illness, and behavioral healthcare needs. Since its founding more than 50 years ago, May Institute has evolved into an award-winning national network that serves over 25,000 individuals and their families every year at more than 200 service locations in the Northeast, Mid-Atlantic, Southeast, and on the West Coast. The Institute operates several schools for children and adolescents with autism and other developmental disabilities. They are located in Randolph, West Springfield, and Woburn, Massachusetts; and Santa Cruz, California.

For more information, contact May Institute at 800-778-7601 or info@mayinstitute.org.