



# Preventing Disability

## What is a Developmental Disability?

Developmental disability is an umbrella term that refers to many disabilities. For ODPC, statute defines a developmental disability as a severe, chronic disability that:

- Is a mental or physical impairment, or both
- Manifested before a person reaches the age of 22
- Will likely continue indefinitely
- Results in substantial limitations in three or more major life activities:
  - Self-care
  - Receptive and expressive language
  - Learning, mobility, self-direction
  - Capacity for independent living and economic sufficiency
- Requires a combination of special interdisciplinary or generic care, treatment, or other lifelong or extended services

Research has helped us identify the cause of about two-thirds of all developmental disabilities. While some disabilities are genetic and unpreventable, other disabilities can be completely prevented.

## Which Developmental Disabilities are Preventable?

Many developmental disabilities are preventable, including:

- Brain injuries
- Fetal alcohol spectrum disorders, including fetal alcohol syndrome
- Neural tube defects
- Other physical or intellectual disabilities

There are a number of different preventable factors that increase the risk of or can cause a developmental disability:

- Prenatal exposure to alcohol, tobacco or other substance, including prescription medications
- Prenatal exposure to certain toxins and heavy metals
- Maternal folic acid (vitamin B) deficiency during pregnancy
- Maternal obesity or unmanaged maternal diabetes during pregnancy

- Maternal infection during pregnancy
- Premature birth and low birth weight
- Delivery complications

Risk factors and causes that occur during infancy and childhood:

- Unaddressed health conditions like severe jaundice or congenital hypothyroidism
- Falls
- Motor vehicle accidents
- Abuse or assault
- Being struck by or against something
- Infection
- Near drowning

### **Levels of Prevention**

**Primary prevention** aims to stop the disability from happening. For example:

- Wearing a seatbelt to prevent brain injury during a motor vehicle accident
- Abstaining from drinking alcohol during pregnancy to prevent fetal alcohol spectrum disorders

**Secondary prevention** is identifying the disability in its earliest stages and intervening to slow or stop its progression. For example:

- Knowing the signs and symptoms of a brain injury to identify a brain injury and immediately getting medical care
- Monitoring a child's development to detect delays and seek help immediately so they get the supports they need to develop skills and functions for their age

**Tertiary prevention** includes interventions to stop or slow the progression of a disability to mitigate its negative consequences and prevent secondary conditions. For example:

- Therapies and treatments that support a child's development and health needs
- Adaptive aids that empower a child to find ways to work around their disability