Left-handedness

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When a person prefers to use the left hand more than the right hand for everyday activities such as eating with a spoon, drawing or writing and opening a door, a person is called left-handed. Left-handedness does not mean that the child is right brain dominant; it simply means his left hand is naturally wired to be more skilled than his right hand.

A variety of studies suggest that 10% of the world’s population is left-handed and one such study at Oxford University has discovered a gene that increases the chance of being left handed. The research involved over 40 scientists from 20 research centres around the world and revealed a gene called LRRTM1, which is the first gene to be discovered which has an effect on handedness. Although very little is known about LRRTM1, the Oxford team suspects that it modifies the development of asymmetry in the human brain. According to them asymmetry of the brain is only found in animals where there is language present and where handedness is obvious.

Research at the Mind Moves Institute in Johannesburg has confirmed the link between the dominant hand and how well a person can express him or herself when writing or talking – especially when under pressure. It has been found that both left-handers and right-handers can express themselves well, but if a child’s handedness has deliberately been changed, talking and communicating fluently becomes more difficult. This has also been confirmed by King George in the movie ‘The King’s Speech’ where the stuttering Bertie acknowledged that he was left handed but forced to become right handed as being right-handed is often perceived as being socially more acceptable.

One of the reasons why being right handed seems to be socially more acceptable is due to the meaning of left and right in Latin. The Latin for the right hand is ‘dexter’, while the left hand is called ‘sinister’ and probably the reason why some people are discouraged from being left-handed.

Left-handed OR right-handed?

- Which hand are you more likely to use to scratch an itch in the centre of your back? L/R
- When eating soup, which hand would hold the spoon? L/R
- When you interlock your fingers, which thumb is uppermost? L/R
- Which hand would instinctively put a key in a lock? L/R
- If you had to point out a person in a crowd, the index finger of which hand is most likely to do the pointing? L/R
- If you were to clap your hands, which hand is uppermost? L/R
- When opening a bottle top, which hand would you use to unscrew the top? L/R
- Fold your arms. Which forearm is uppermost? L/R
- If you were to raise your hand to answer a question, which hand would you raise? L/R

What does left or right-handed mean?

Because the hands and mouth are on the same neurological loop, the dominant hand determines how a child tends to talk and write. This neurological loop can be seen when a child who has to perform an intricate task like threading a needle, cutting with scissors or painting along a fine line, moves his jaw and tongue in support of the fine muscle control required by the hands.
Right-handedness
The right hand, which is controlled by the language-oriented left brain hemisphere, is more apt at fine muscle control resulting more often in neat and precise handwriting, and attention to syntax, semantics and detail. A right hand dominance usually indicates an extensive vocabulary and an exact and factual communication style. The right hand may not be as free and daring when doing art, preferring to work with pen and ink or rather doing calligraphy instead.

Left-handedness
The left hand is controlled by the right brain hemisphere. It is a creative and artistic hand that enjoys bold, free-flowing movements. It does not like being confined by lines and prefers working on unlined paper. Handwriting tends to be big and bold and may change according to the mood. Verbal communication is emotional and characterised by figurative speech and hand gestures.

Is left-handedness a disability?
In a right-handed world, left-handedness can sometimes feel like a disability when wanting to use a pencil sharpener, scissors, can openers or sitting next to a right-hander when the two elbows compete for desk space. Digital and video cameras may be difficult to use because the controls favour the right hand. Hunting without a left-handed gun may prove to be risky, while playing right-handed musical instruments with the left hand may be challenging and using right-handed sports equipment prove frustrating.

Practical tips

Refrain from viewing left-handedness as a disability
Left-handedness is just different, not a disability.

Make your child aware of being left-handed
Anticipate potential problem areas and teach him/her ways to overcome any obstacles such as placing his own knife and fork in a comfortable position or requesting a left-handed bat or scissors.

Where to sit in the classroom
It is best for a left-handed child to be seated on the left of a desk to avoid knocking elbows with a right handed.

Writing
When writing, the pen or pencil should be held about 2cm away from the tip so the child is able to see what is being written. The body should be turned slightly to the right with the paper placed a little to their left and sloping to the right.

Studying
The light should be above the right shoulder to avoid any shadows from falling on the paper.

Scissors
Left-handed scissors are the only ones that can be used and are available at most stationers. A left handed child using right-handed scissors will not be able to see the cutting line and will also find that the paper slides in between the blades instead of cutting it.

When teaching a new skill
Sit opposite the child instead of behind or beside so the movements are mirrored when teaching how to tie shoelaces and ties, knit and sew.

“Different side” coaching
Left-handed children are sometimes forced to use their right hand, due to a lack of equipment and training on how to coach left-handers. Children should be encouraged to use whichever hand feels most comfortable by offering different side training and coaching. Lefties often have an advantage in tennis, baseball, fencing, boxing and cricket as they have the benefit of surprise and their opponents may be forced to use a different technique.
This can be put to great advantage because right-handers have less practice playing against left-handers. Interesting to know that there were left-handers in the finals of all four categories of this year’s Wimbledon finals - men: Rafael Nadal, women: Petra Kvitova, boys: Liam Broady and girls: Irina Khromacheva.

**INTERESTING INFO from www.anythinglefthanded.co.uk**

- Left handedness is not a disability but it can affect a child’s choice of a career as surgeons often lack access to left handed instruments while training and are more prone to needle prick injuries than their right handed colleagues*. “One out of every 10 left handed surgeons is also uncomfortable with the idea of being operated on by a left handed surgeon, says a report in *Current Surgery*. Six percent also reported concerns by patients about their laterality “.

- If anyone picks a fight with you, tell them you’re left handed and they may well think again!

  Scientists at the University of Montpellier in France believe left-handers continue to thrive because they do well in combat.

- You can tell if someone is right or left-handed by checking which way their hair grows out of their scalp. Right-handed people tend to have hair that swirls clockwise from the crown, while people who are left-handed or ambidextrous, have no such pattern – their hair can coil in either direction.

- Left-handers might have the advantage in careers like piloting a jet fighter or talking and driving at the same time. A study published in the journal *Neuropsychology* in 2006 suggests that left-handed people are faster at processing multiple stimuli than righties.

**HANDY MIND MOVES® FOR LEFT AND RIGHT HANDERS**

**Bilateral Integrator:** Hold 2 pencils with coloured ribbons hanging down the ends between the thumbs and index fingers. The pencils must simultaneously rest on the web between the thumb and index finger. Move the arms in a mirror image as though conducting a choir.

**Palm Stretch.** Extend the fingers as wide as possible for a count of eight, and then relax. Make a tight fist, hold for a count of eight, and relax. Breathe slowly while doing the move.

**Finger Fight:** Push the forefinger against the thumb, maintaining the pressure for a count of eight, then let go. Alternate fingers until all four fingers have had a turn.

**SOURCES**