

## Learn how to learn at Sunflower

**The importance of occupational therapy is fast becoming apparent in our mainstream schools as well as in our special education facilities.**

In the classroom, children are compared daily with their same age group and teachers are becoming more aware of detecting the early signs of possible need. It is also internationally proven that early detection and early intervention or treatment has the best possible outcome in helping these children overcome their difficulties.

The Sunflower Clinic is an independent occupa-

tional therapist service in Cork operating for the past 10 years and has seen over 5,000 children with a range of needs.

In a recent interview with Julie O'Sullivan, founder and head occupational therapist at The Sunflower Clinic, she spoke of the importance of a child's ability to learn.

"If a child cannot sit still, it is difficult for them to learn effectively. Learning involves four key aspects," says Julie.

"Firstly, the child must be able to concentrate for long enough to listen to what the teacher is saying. Then, they need to be able to sit still



These vital components are grouped into gross and fine motor, visual perceptual, movement control and concentration skills. PHOTO: THE SUNFLOWER CLINIC

and process the information. They need to attend to what is important and be able to screen out what is irrelevant.

"Finally, they need to be able to communicate what they have heard and learnt, most often via handwriting."

These vital components are grouped into gross and fine motor, visual perceptual, movement control and concentration skills.

"Whilst we get a lot of enquiries about handwriting difficulties specifically, it is the other skills that are often the source of the dif-

ficulty. Think of it like a pyramid, where the more fundamental skills are at the bottom and the more complex tasks, e.g. handwriting are at the top."

The fundamental role of the occupational therapist is to work on these core skills to improve a child's ability

to perform the more complex tasks on the top of the pyramid.

The Sunflower Clinic has started a series of groups aimed at school-aged children specifically to target the needs of these children to help them develop the social and motor skills needed to fully access the school curriculum.

### THESE GROUPS INCLUDE:

- Handwriting group for junior and senior infants, first class to third class and fourth class to sixth class. These groups focus on the key underlying skills required to improve handwriting legibility and fluency.

- Sensory motor group - The aim of this group is the development of sensory, perceptual and motor skills through play-based activities to help with the child's overall development.

- Social skills group - Children with social anxiety, learning disabilities, sensory integration difficulties, Autism Spectrum Disorder, ADHD, neurological disorders, and emotional disabilities often need extra help.

Fortunately, social skills can be taught by trained professionals in a safe environment where these newly learned skills can be practiced and mastered.

The clinic also runs its summer camps for children with a range of needs, including on the following dates:

11-14 July  
22-25 August

The camps are designed for children to have fun whilst developing skills to help them improve their overall performance.

**For more information, visit [sunflowerclinic.ie](http://sunflowerclinic.ie) or call 021-4321729.**

## CNM COLLEGE OF NATUROPATHIC MEDICINE

TRAINING SUCCESSFUL PRACTITIONERS

### Q: WHAT ARE PREBIOTICS AND PROBIOTICS AND HOW CAN THEY HELP WITH YOUR DIGESTION COMPLAINTS:

Are you feeling bombarded by the vast range and type of pre and probiotics available on the shelves? Do and wonder how exactly they work and how they can enhance your digestive health?



#### Probiotics:

Our bodies are mostly composed of bacteria, with the majority of these bacteria found in our digestive system. These are crucial in their beneficial role at influencing our overall health, along with our digestive health. Good bacteria, such as Lactobacillus and Bifidobacteria may become imbalanced by an overgrowth of bad bacteria through lifestyle factors, such as stress and poor nutrition choices, as well as alcohol and antibiotic use.

A probiotic is a form of good bacteria which not only works to restore the balance of good and bad bacteria in your gut, but it can also help to relieve digestive issues and protect your immune system. The effects of a probiotic are determined by the strains of bacteria used in its manufacture, such as Lactobacillus acidophilus.

#### Prebiotics:

A prebiotic, which may be incorporated in certain probiotics, is a natural fibre that works to enhance both the balance and effect of probiotics by providing substrate for their growth. Some great prebiotic food sources include Jerusalem artichoke, garlic, leeks, onions and asparagus, all of which can be easily added into the diet. To achieve the optimal benefits when choosing your probiotic supplement, always aim to choose an option which incorporates a prebiotic, as these will work in synergy to enhance the overall action of the formula.

This information has been brought to you by Nutritional Therapist and College of Naturopathic Medicine graduate Caroline Punch, who specialises in digestive health. If you would like to find out how you can train at CNM Cork for an exciting new career in Naturopathic Nutrition, join us on our next free open evening:

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- Rhinitis
- Chronic bronchitis

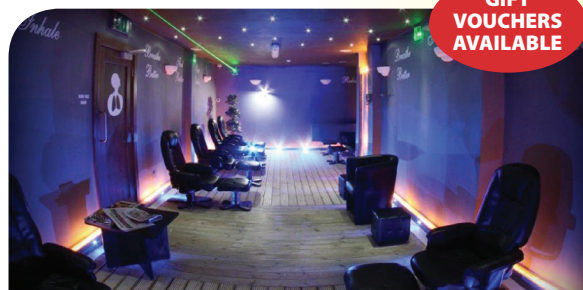
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## Greater understanding of 'rare' diseases needed

Tom Horan

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Uncommon and often misdiagnosed, there are some medical conditions for which easy diagnosis and treatment is not possible.

'Rare Disease Day 2016' gathered these isolated conditions together into a world-wide collective that's hard to overlook.

Over 6,000 conditions fall under the 'rare disease' umbrella. In the European Union, a disease is defined as rare if it affects fewer than 1 in 1,000 people. One such disease is Ehlers Danlos Syndrome (EDS), a connective tissue disorder that affects the skin, joints and blood vessel walls. It often manifests as Hypermobility Syndrome (HMS), where joints become overly flexible and prone to dislocation.

"We don't believe it's rare, but instead rarely diagnosed," say Yvonne Evans Nevin with advocacy group Irish EDS and HMS. She was 14 when her joints began to ache, accompanied by constant tiredness. These feelings

only worsened through college, further still after the birth of her son.

She first looked into EDS while interning at the Cork Independent, after interviewing a woman with the condition. Her diagnosis in 2013 finally explained symptoms that were until then, assumed to be by-products of depression.

"It was after eight years of taking anti-depressants that I was properly diagnosed. I never took them again," she said. Yvonne's six year old son has been diagnosed with EDS, and her daughter is also showing symptoms.

Irish EDS & HMS seeks to raise public awareness, particularly within the medical community. There are no specialists to treat EDS or HMS in Ireland, obliging those with the disease to travel.

The National Rare Disease Plan for Ireland aims to be fully in place by 2018. This steering group recommends better coordination between national medical databases and practitioners, as well as improved facilities.