

Cerebral palsy

What is cerebral palsy?

Cerebral palsy is a term used to describe a variety of disorders that affect the child's ability to move and balance. Classifications of cerebral palsy are based on type (referring to muscle tone) and the location of the movement problem. All children with cerebral palsy have abnormal muscle tone. The muscle tone may be very high (spastic/hypertonia) or low (floppy/hypotonia) or there may be fluctuating muscle tone (athetosis or ataxia). Cerebral palsy may be classified according to the location of the movement disorder. Diplegia indicates that the legs are primarily affected, hemiplegia indicates that one side of the body is affected and quadriplegia indicates that all extremities are affected.

What is the cause?

Cerebral palsy is caused by damage to the area of the brain that controls movement, posture and balance. The injury to the brain generally occurs either before, during or after birth. Damage to the brain is commonly a result of bleeding within the brain (usually associated with prematurity), lack of oxygen to the brain, or infection (such as CMV). Cerebral palsy is NOT a progressive disorder. Depending on the extent and location of brain injury, the child with cerebral palsy is at risk for other developmental disabilities such as learning disabilities, mental retardation, vision and hearing deficits, seizures and language disorders. Intervention in cerebral palsy may involve a variety of professionals including therapists, educators and physicians who specialize in treatment of this disorder.

What are some signs?

Signs of cerebral palsy include delays in achieving motor milestones (particularly sitting and walking), movements which appear very stiff in nature, strong use of one hand/leg during movement and feeding difficulties.

Online Resources

Siskin Children's Institute • www.siskin.org

American Academy for Cerebral Palsy
and Developmental Medicine • www.aacpdm.org • 847- 698-1635

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention—
Cerebral Palsy • www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/dd/ddcp.htm • 1-800-CDC-INFO

Cerebral Palsy Foundation • www.cerebralpalsyinfo.org

Kids Quest • www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/kids/default.htm

Ontario Federation for Cerebral Palsy • www.ofcp.on.ca/ • 1-877-244-9686

Tennessee Disability • www.familypathfinder.org

The Cerebral Palsy Network • www.thecpnetwork.org

United Cerebral Palsy Associations • www.ucpa.org • 1-800-872-5827