

# Cerebral Palsy

## Definition:

- An umbrella-like term for a group of disorders that impair control of movement
  - Cerebral: two halves (hemispheres) of the brain
  - Palsy: weakness or problem with using muscles
- Not a problem in the muscles or nerves, but in the impulses from the brain to those muscles

## FACTS:

- Appears early in life (80% develop before birth or within first month)
- Not progressive; normal life span
- Spectrum
- Symptoms determined by location and intensity of damage
- Not contagious or inherited
- 10,000 babies born in the U.S. each year with CP
- 70% have other disabilities also (seizures, mental retardation)
- Does NOT always cause significant disability

## TYPES/CHARACTERISTICS:

- **Spastic** - 70-80%
  - o Too much muscle tone or tightness
  - o Movements are stiff, especially in arms and legs
  - o Usually turn in or scissor legs as try to walk
- **Athetoid** - (also called Dyskinetic) - 10-20%
  - o Slow uncontrolled body movements and low muscle tone
  - o Hard for person to sit straight and walk
- **Ataxic** - 5-10%
  - o Affects balance and depth perception resulting in poor coordination and unsteady gait
- **Mixed** - Combination of symptoms
  - o Both high and low muscle tone
  - o Results in a mix of stiff and involuntary movements

## OTHER DESCRIPTIONS:

- **Diplegia** - only legs affected
- **Hemiplegia** - one-half the body affected (right arm and leg or left side)
- **Quadriplegia** - both arms and legs affected; sometimes also facial muscles and torso

## HOW DIAGNOSED:

- Usually diagnosed by a physician, many times a developmental specialist
- Based on symptoms such as motor delays, muscle tone abnormality, difficulty with feeding/diapering/bathing
- Can confirm damage with scans
- May know to watch for it if trauma occurred during labor and delivery

## CAUSES:

- **Acquired** - 10-20%
  - o Brain infections (bacterial meningitis, viral encephalitis)
  - o Head injury (falls, motor vehicle accidents, abuse)
- **Congenital** - 80-90%
  - o Infections during pregnancy (rubella)
  - o Rh incompatibility
  - o Oxygen shortage
  - o Trauma in labor/delivery

## IMPACT:

The impact of CP on the life of the child or adult is directly related to the degree of damage in the brain.

- **Mild CP** - the person may appear clumsy
- **Moderate CP** - the person may walk with a limp or may need a leg brace or cane
- **Severe CP** - affects all parts of the person's physical abilities; may use a wheelchair and other equipment, may have learning problems, problems with hearing or vision or mental retardation

## INTERVENTIONS:

- Assist families in connecting with services as quickly as possible, particularly with therapies:
  - o **Physical Therapy (PT)**  
Helps develop stronger muscles, particularly in the legs and trunk. Works on skills such as walking, sitting and keeping balance.
  - o **Occupational Therapy (OT)**  
Helps develop fine motor skills such as dressing, feeding, writing and other daily living tasks. Also assists with sensory processing dysfunction.
  - o **Speech-Language Therapy (SLT)**  
Helps develop communication skills, including articulation and language. Speech may be difficult due to problems with muscle tone in oral area (face, lips, tongue, throat). May work with augmentative/alternative communication systems (pictures, symbols, electronic devices).
  
- Assist with implementation of therapy programs
  
- Learn to love assistive technology (e.g., adapted toys, environmental controls, computers) and encourage its use to enable the person to be as independent as possible
  
- Be inventive. Always ask yourself, “How can I adapt this so John can participate more?”
  
- Pay attention to positioning
  
- Be sure you have adequate person-power for lifting or transfers
  
- Remember that if a person with CP is unable to speak, it does not mean that he/she cannot understand

**ACCESS CODE** for test: **Path2017**

### **Additional Information Sources**

- United Cerebral Palsy Associations, Inc.  
www.ucpa.org  
1-800-USA-5UCP (872-5827)
- National Institutes of Health  
www.nih.gov  
1-301-496-4000
- United Cerebral Palsy of Central Arkansas  
Info@ucpcark.org  
1-501-227-5591
- National Information Center for Children and Youth with Disabilities  
www.nichcy.org  
1-800-695-0285

### **Included Resource Material**

- Cerebral Palsy Among Children - National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities (3 Pages)
- Cerebral Palsy Fact Sheet Number 2 - National Information Center for Children and Youth with Disabilities (8 Pages)