

Cerebral Palsy is a condition that affects movement and posture. The word Cerebral refers to the brain and the word Palsy refers to paralysis.

Cerebral Palsy or CP is caused by damage to the brain in its early stages of development. The damage can occur before, during, or after birth up to 3 years of age, and the damage is permanent. Messages or impulses from the brain do not reach the muscles correctly, therefore arms, legs and other areas of the body cannot be controlled properly. Cerebral Palsy is also referred to as 'spasticity', although spasticity is only one type of cerebral palsy.

Some causes of cerebral palsy include:

- Pre-natal factors, e.g. Rubella.
- Peri-natal factors e.g. prematurity, respiratory obstruction (causes lack of oxygen to the brain and therefore brain cells die).
- Birth trauma.
- Post-natal factors e.g. infections, encephalitis, meningitis, head injuries.

## TYPES OF CEREBRAL PALSY

### Spastic

Spasticity means stiffness or tightness of muscle making movement difficult to initiate. The ability to speak may also be affected. This is the most common type of cerebral palsy.

### Athetoid

Athetosis describes the uncontrolled movements that occur in this type of cerebral palsy. The child has uncoordinated and unintended body movements and may also have excessive facial movements, dribbling and poor speech.

### Ataxic

Ataxia describes the unsteady movements or tremor, typical of the child with ataxic cerebral palsy. These children have poor balance and an unsteady walking pattern. This is the least common type of cerebral palsy.

### Mixed Types

Many children have a combination of the above 3 types of cerebral palsy.

## PARTS OF THE BODY AFFECTED

### Hemiplegia

The leg and arm on one side of the body are affected.

### Quadriplegia

Arms, legs and trunk are all affected, as are the muscles of the face and mouth. This is the most severe form of cerebral palsy.

### Diplegia

Both legs and both arms are affected, but the legs are significantly more affected than the arms. Children with diplegia have difficulty in walking and may have slightly clumsy hand movements.

Children with cerebral palsy coming into care will be involved with therapists. This could be a physiotherapist, an occupational therapist or a speech therapist, or perhaps all three.

Each child will have individual needs and therapy requirements. It is, therefore, essential to talk to parents about the therapy the child needs, and whether or not you can help. It may, for example, be important to find out how the child should be

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carried to avoid muscle spasms.

The child may need to wear splints on his/her arms and/or legs, and carers should seek advice on how and when these are worn, and the best methods for putting them on and taking them off.

Supportive seating or a standing frame (provided by the treatment agency) may also be necessary for maintenance of good posture, and the enhancement of a child's skills. It is essential that such equipment is used to position the child properly, for it is important in preventing deformity.

## ASSOCIATED DISABILITIES

Cerebral Palsy is a complex condition, and children may have problems additional to poor motor control. These can include: intellectual disability, vision and/or hearing impairment, epilepsy, communication disorders and perceptual difficulties. Some children may have none of these problems, and others may have several. The degree to which the child is affected can also vary.

Although people who have cerebral palsy may take a long time to say or do something, this does not mean that they do not understand, or that they are less intelligent than another person. When caring for, or talking to, a person with cerebral palsy it is important to be patient and find out if the person needs your help.

Caregivers need not be overwhelmed by the idea of caring for a child who has cerebral palsy. With assistance from parents and the support of resource people, caregivers have found that caring for a child with CP is not as difficult as it may seem.

For further information and advice, contact CHILD Australia.

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