



Cerebral Palsy

Cerebral palsy, a group of disorders that affect movement and muscle coordination, is the leading cause of motor disability among children in the U.S. Symptoms can vary widely, ranging from mild cases that cause only slight difficulty walking to more severe cases in which specialized care is needed.



Q: What is cerebral palsy (CP)?

Cerebral palsy is a group of neurological disorders that impair muscle control and movement. Symptoms emerge in infancy or early childhood.

Q: What causes CP?

Cerebral Palsy is caused by abnormal brain development or damage to the developing brain that can occur before or during birth, or within the first years of life.

The majority of CP (85-95%) is congenital (occurring before or during birth.) A small percentage is caused by lack of oxygen during birth, but the specific cause in most cases is unknown.

When CP occurs more than 28 days after birth, it is known as acquired CP and is typically related to an infection (such as meningitis) or head injury.

Q: What are the different types of CP?

Cerebral palsy is categorized around the main type of movement that is affected.

Spastic cerebral palsy, characterized by muscle stiffness, is the most common type of cerebral palsy. Symptoms depend on what parts of the body are involved.

- **Spastic diplegia:** Tight muscles in the hips and both legs will cause legs to turn inward and cross at the knees in what is known as ‘scissoring’.
- **Spastic hemiplegia:** One side of the body is affected, with the arm typically more impaired than the leg.
- **Spastic quadriplegia:** All four limbs, the trunk, and the muscles controlling the mouth and tongue are affected. These are the most severe cases; walking is not usually possible and intellectual disabilities, seizures, and problems with vision, hearing and speech may also be present.

Dyskinetic cerebral palsy, characterized by fluctuations in muscle tone, limits control over movement in the hands, arms, feet, and legs. Children may have trouble learning to control their bodies well enough to sit and walk. If muscles in the face and tongue are affected, there may also be difficulties with sucking, swallowing and speaking.

Ataxic cerebral palsy affects balance and coordination. Symptoms may include an unsteady gait and difficulty with actions that require precise coordination, such as writing or buttoning clothing.

Mixed cerebral palsy occurs when individuals have symptoms of more than one type of CP; the most common combination is spastic-dyskinetic CP.

Q: What are the signs of CP?

The main signs that a child may have CP are delayed movement-related milestones, including rolling over, sitting, standing and walking.

Other symptoms that may appear in the first few years of a child’s life are poor muscle

tone, stiffness in joints or muscles, uncontrolled movements in arms or legs, lack of coordination and/or balance, difficulty swallowing, muscle spasticity, tremors, and difficulty with fine motor skills.

Q: What other conditions might affect a child with CP?

Some children living with CP might also experience intellectual disabilities, seizure disorders, delayed growth and development, spinal deformities (scoliosis), impaired vision, hearing loss, speech and language disorders, incontinence, excess drooling, dental problems, diminished bone health and learning difficulties.

Q: How is CP diagnosed?

Doctors monitor a child's growth and development; if symptoms emerge indicating CP, a developmental screening will be given to identify and assess specific delays. Developmental and medical evaluations will follow the screening to diagnose the specific type of CP. If symptoms are mild, diagnosis may not be confirmed until age 4 or 5.

Q: How is CP treated?

While there is currently no cure for CP, a variety of symptom-specific treatments, including medication, surgery, braces, and physical, occupational, speech and recreation therapies, can help manage the disorder, increase independence, and improve quality of life.

Q: Are there clinical trials for CP?

Yes. To find current CP trials, visit ClinicalTrials.gov (<https://clinicaltrials.gov>), a searchable website for publicly and privately supported clinical studies maintained by the National Library of Medicine at the National Institutes of Health (<https://www.nlm.nih.gov>).

Sources: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke.

Need to talk to someone?

Our Information Specialists are available to answer your questions.

Call toll-free 1-800-539-7309 Mon-Fri, 9 am-8 pm EST.

Or schedule a call or ask a question online at

<https://www.ChristopherReeve.org/Ask>.

Resources for Cerebral Palsy

United Cerebral Palsy (UCP)

<http://www.ucp.org>

1825 K Street NW, Suite 600

Washington, DC 20006

Phone: 202-776-0406 or 800-872-5827 (Toll-free)

Email: info@ucp.org

UCP works to advance the independence, productivity, and inclusion of people with cerebral palsy by providing services and support in communities throughout the country.

American Academy for Cerebral Palsy and Developmental Medicine (AACPDM)

<http://www.aacpdm.org/>

555 East Wells, Suite 1100

Milwaukee, WI 53202

Phone: 414-918-3014

Email: info@AACPDM.org

AACPDM is a multidisciplinary scientific society that works to improve the quality of life for people living with cerebral palsy and other childhood onset disabilities.

Cerebral Palsy Foundation (CPF)

www.yourcpf.org

3 Columbus Circle, 15th Floor

New York, NY 10019

Phone: 212-520-1686

Email: info@yourcpf.org

CPF, a non-profit organization that works to advance widespread treatments for CP, provides fact sheets for individuals and families.

Cerebral Palsy Research Foundation (CPRF)

<http://www.cprf.org/>

5111 East 21st Street N.

Wichita, KS 67208

Phone: 316-688-1888

Email: info@cprf.org

CPRF provides services, support, and technological resources to people with disabilities to increase employment opportunities and personal independence. Resources include a free “Wellbeing Guide” and “CP Tool Kit” available for purchase.

Cerebral Palsy Research Network

<https://cprn.org/>

PO Box 8347

Greenville SC 29604

Phone: 402-302-4776

This organization, comprised of hospitals and community members, works to advance research, education, and quality of life for individuals with cerebral palsy and their families.

March of Dimes

<http://www.marchofdimes.com/>

National Office

1550 Crystal Dr.
Arlington, VA 22202
Phone: 888-663-4637

The March of Dimes works to prevent premature pregnancies and advance research related to childhood disease. Its website offers information about health conditions affecting children, including cerebral palsy.

MedlinePlus: Cerebral Palsy

<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/cerebralpalsy.html>

MedlinePlus, the National Library of Medicine's online resource for patients and families, contains information about cerebral palsy.

National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke (NINDS): Cerebral Palsy

http://www.ninds.nih.gov/disorders/cerebral_palsy/cerebral_palsy.htm

NINDS

P.O Box 5801
Bethesda, MD 20824
Phone: 800-352-9424

The National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke is part of the National Institute of Health. Its website features information about cerebral palsy, including treatment, prognosis, and research.

Nemours Children's Hospital Gait and Motion Analysis Laboratory

<https://www.nemours.org/services/gait-and-motion-analysis.html>

1600 Rockland Rd
Wilmington, DE 19803
Phone: 302-651-4000

Nemours is a pediatric hospital that features a specialized clinic to diagnose and analyze movement-related disorders, including cerebral palsy.

St. Louis Children's Hospital Center for Cerebral Palsy Spasticity

<https://www.stlouischildrens.org/conditions-treatments/center-for-cerebral-palsy-spasticity>

One Children's Place
St. Louis, MO 83110
Phone: 314-454-2813
Toll-free: 800-416-9956

The Center offers a spasticity management program using rhizotomy.

UCLA Health Center for Cerebral Palsy

<https://www.uclahealth.org/ccp/>

1225 15th St.
Santa Monica, CA 90404
Phone: 424-259-6593

This interdisciplinary clinic at UCLA evaluates and treats people with cerebral palsy.

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