

CEREBRAL PALSY



What is cerebral palsy?

Cerebral palsy (CP) is a group of neurologic (brain) disorders that affects the way the brain communicates with muscles. This causes lifelong difficulty with movement, strength, and balance. While CP doesn't worsen over time, the symptoms can change with growth and development. It occurs in about 3 out of every 1,000 babies born.

What causes cerebral palsy?

The specific cause of CP is often unknown. It occurs when there is abnormal development or damage to areas of the brain that control movement. Most of these problems occur as the baby grows in the womb, but they can happen at any time during birth or the first few years of life, while the brain is still developing. There are many things that increase the risk for CP including prematurity, bleeding in the brain, very low birth weight, infections of the body or brain, substance abuse during pregnancy, or trauma. We can sometimes determine a cause for CP based on a child's medical history or by evaluating the structure of the brain through brain imaging. Sometimes a cause is never found.

What are the symptoms of cerebral palsy?

The symptoms of cerebral palsy can range from mild to severe. Symptoms include weakness or stiffness in parts of the body. Babies with CP are often slow to roll over, sit, crawl, or walk and talk. As children get older they often develop more stiffness (called spasticity) or have shaking (called clonus) in their arms or legs.

Many children with CP also have other problems, which can include:

- Difficulty with eating or drinking, and poor weight gain
- Frequent lung infections
- Difficulty with learning, focus, or behavior
- Problems with hearing or speaking
- Vision or eye problems (being "cross-eyed" or having a "lazy eye", also called strabismus)
- Seizures
- Curvature of the spine (called scoliosis)

How is cerebral palsy diagnosed?

The diagnosis of CP is made through history and physical exam. There is no specific test or study for cerebral palsy. The diagnosis is often delayed until a child is at least 6 to 12 months old. Medical providers may want to observe a child's early development and watch for symptoms to develop as the child grows. Sometimes, other tests such as an MRI (a type of brain image), can be helpful for identifying areas of brain injury. In some cases, blood work may be done, including genetic testing or metabolic testing.

What is the treatment for cerebral palsy?

While there is no cure for cerebral palsy, there are treatments to help minimize the symptoms. Therapies (such as physical, occupational, speech, and behavioral therapy) are the most important treatment, and many children benefit from therapies which encourage and support movement, mobility, motor skills, and speech. Equipment such as leg braces, walkers or wheel chairs can help with mobility. Medicines can help with muscle tightness. Surgery is sometimes done to help increase movement and positioning of joints in arms, legs, hips or back.

What will life be like with cerebral palsy?

Cerebral palsy can be very mild or very severe. Children with mild forms of cerebral palsy live as long as people without the disorder and lead full, productive lives. They may need some therapies or medical services to help support their development and reduce the impact of the disorder. Children with moderate or severe cerebral palsy may require more involved medical care, and special equipment or nursing care in the home. Children with the most severe forms of cerebral palsy might have shortened lives due to medical complications of their cerebral palsy.

Resources and References

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

http://kidshealth.org/parent/medical/brain/cerebral_palsy.html

<http://cerebralpalsy.org/>

