

Cerebral Palsy

Important information for patients, parents and carers

Your child has been diagnosed with Cerebral Palsy. This leaflet will briefly explain about the condition and refer you to other sources of information.

As parents, all the information provided may be difficult to take in. This process of starting to know and understand your child with Cerebral Palsy is a journey and will take time. There will be good and more difficult times. If you are unsure of anything at all, please ask one of the professionals involved with your child's care for information or help.

What is Cerebral Palsy?

Cerebral Palsy describes a group of disorders caused by damage to the brain. It results in physical impairment affecting body movement, co-ordination, balance and posture. Cerebral Palsy is neither contagious nor progressive, nor is there a cure.

There are different types of Cerebral Palsy, which are related to the part of the brain that has been affected. No two children with Cerebral Palsy will be affected in quite the same way. There is no single cause for Cerebral Palsy.

The symptoms of Cerebral Palsy include an early change in muscle tone. Muscle tone is measured by the amount of resistance there is to a stretch on a muscle. Low muscle tone means the affected area feels floppy. This is called **hypotonia**. High muscle tone means the muscle feels stiff – this is **hypertonia**. Other signs include altered reflexes and difficulty in muscle control. Movements may be jerky or slow.

Cerebral Palsy is the most common physical impairment in childhood affecting approximately one in every 400 children.

What causes Cerebral Palsy?

The Paediatrician may not be able to explain exactly why part of the brain has been damaged or has failed to develop, as there may be no obvious or single reason.

Relevant factors that can lead to Cerebral Palsy include:

- Infection in the early part of pregnancy
- Premature birth – pre-term babies are extremely vulnerable and at risk of haemorrhage, infection and oxygen deprivation to the brain. A third of babies born prematurely go on to develop Cerebral Palsy. There is also an increased risk of Cerebral Palsy in premature babies with a birth weight of under 500g
- A difficult birth, which can cause injury to the baby's head, and if a baby has difficulty breathing there is sometimes a risk that not enough oxygen reaches their brain

- Illness or injury after birth – this can include the effects of other conditions or illnesses, such as meningitis and hydrocephalus, a head injury, very high fever or a lack of oxygen from choking or near-miss cot death

Types of Cerebral Palsy

There are essentially four categories of Cerebral Palsy, which are:

- Spastic
- Athetoid (or dyskinetic)
- Ataxic
- Mixed

Please refer to other sources of information provided at the end of this leaflet for more information on the different types of Cerebral Palsy.

Associated conditions

There are sometimes associated difficulties with a child with Cerebral Palsy. There may be difficulties with learning, visual or spatial perception, visual-motor difficulties (difficulty combining movement with vision) as well as sensory impairment (hearing, vision, touch, taste or smell). The child may also develop epilepsy. However, every child is different.

Prognosis

No one can tell you how your child will be affected by the condition. However, in general, the more severe the child's physical, functional or cognitive impairment, the greater the possibility of difficulties with walking. The health professionals in your child's care will record and monitor your child's developmental progress. The progress will be discussed with you along with any possible implications for the future.

The more severe the child's physical, functional or cognitive impairment, the greater the possibility of difficulties with speech and language. 1 in 2 has difficulties of communication. 1 in 3 has specific difficulties with speech and language.

Management

Useful information to give you an understanding of your child's needs and forming a relationship with your child can be found online see Useful Information 4. Early Support - Information for Parents.

Management of your child's condition will depend on their individual needs. This could include many different agencies including:

- Physiotherapists
- Occupational Therapists
- Speech and Language Therapists
- Paediatricians (acute and community)
- Tertiary Hospital Specialists
- Orthopaedic Surgeons
- Ophthalmologist, Audiology
- Community Nurses (Home Care Team, Health Visitors or School Nurses)
- Education and other professionals from voluntary organisations (multidisciplinary team)

You and your child may need to attend a number of different appointments with different professionals. As parents, you will probably also need to attend multiagency meetings in the future, so that your child can access more support (e.g. Team Around Family (TAF)/Common Assessment Framework (CAF)/Action for Inclusion (AFI) meetings).

Care of your child will concentrate on facilitating activity, participation and communication. Eating and drinking skills are also assessed by the Speech and Language Therapist. Physiotherapy and postural management are often components of the management of a child with Cerebral Palsy. Monitoring of hip position and musculoskeletal problems are also important.

The Paediatric Physiotherapy, Occupational and Speech and Language Therapy Services provide skilled therapy assessment and treatment for children with Cerebral Palsy up to 16 years (and young people aged up to 19 years in certain circumstances). It is a community based service provided in clinics, early-years settings, schools and home environments.

Useful sources for information

1. SCOPE (www.scope.org.uk/) Telephone: 0808 800 3333, E-mail: helpline@scope.org.uk
2. HemiHelp (www.hemihelp.org.uk/)
3. Contact a Family (www.cafamily.org.uk)
4. Early Support-Information for Parents. Cerebral Palsy- 2012 .2ND Edition (Google and type in 'Early Support Information for Parents on Cerebral Palsy/Council for Disabled', and click the relevant attachment to take you to this resource) (<https://councilfordisabledchildren.org.uk/help-resources/resources/early-support-information-cerebral-palsy>)
5. CHESHIRE WEST AND CHESTER LOCALOFFER/SERVICEDIRECTORY (www.westcheshirelocaloffer.co.uk)
6. LOCAL OFFER – CHESHIRE EAST (www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/.../local_offer/local_offer.aspx)

This leaflet has been adapted from the above sources of information on Cerebral Palsy.

Information available in audio, Braille, large print and other languages. To request a copy, please ask a member of staff.

