

Cerebral Palsy

Definition:

Cerebral palsy is a term used to describe a group of chronic conditions affecting body movements and muscle coordination. It is caused by damage to one or more specific areas of the brain, usually occurring during fetal development or infancy. It also can occur before, during or shortly following birth.

Description:

- A chronic movement or posture disorder affecting the brain's ability to control the body
- Not contagious or inherited; it is caused by irreversible brain damage
- Non-progressive disorder and there is no known cure
- Most cases occur during pregnancy (75%) although some are caused during birth (5%) and in early childhood (15%)
- Affects both sexes; firstborn children are affected more frequently
- Developmental delays, such as trouble sitting upright, awkward posture, or trouble sucking are the key warning signs; the symptoms appear during the first few years of life

Characteristics:

There are four types of cerebral palsy:

- **Spastic** is the most common type of CP (70-80%). Neuromuscular condition that includes difficult or stiff movement in one or more areas of the body (i.e. hypertonicity). Classifications: spastic hemiplegia, spastic diplegia, and spastic quadriplegia
- **Ataxic** is a loss of depth perception and balance and hypotonicity (5-10% not common on its own)
- **Athetoid/Dyskinetic** mixed muscle tone, involves uncontrolled or involuntary movements and trouble sitting upright (25%)
- **Mixed** is a combination of two or more types

Causes:

- 80% of causes are unknown
- Some known causes are injury during birth, due to brain damage and brain injury
- Maternal use of drugs and alcohol
- Maternal infection such as Rh incompatibility
- Neonatal infection such as jaundice and rubella
- Premature birth

Implications for speech and language:

Cerebral palsy may affect an individual's ability to communicate in a variety of ways, including:

- Difficulty co-coordinating muscle movements needed for speech
- Difficulty expressing needs and wants
- Difficulty creating cohesive sentences
- Social problems, related to difficulty communicating

Diagnosing this Disorder:

Speech-language pathologists do not diagnose cerebral palsy. Doctors diagnose cerebral palsy by obtaining a complete medical history of development, examining the child and evaluating the child's movements.

Treatment:

In addition to physical and occupational therapy services, speech-language therapy may be used to help control muscles around the mouth and jaw in order to improve speech production. Therapy may also target use of language to express wants and needs and formulating complete sentences, depending on the needs of the individual.

Resources:

Books for kids:

- *Just like any other beagle.* (1992) Miami, FL: Cordis Corporation.
- *We can do it!* Dwight, L. (1997) New York City, NY: Star Bright Books.

Books for Parents:

- *Approach to treatment of the baby.* Boehme, R. (1990). Tucson, AZ: Therapy Skill Builders.
- Geralis, E (1998).
- *Children with cerebral palsy: A parents' guide.* Bethesda, MD: Woodbine House.
- *Cerebra/palsy: A complete guide for caregiving.* (1995) Miller, F., & Bachrach, S. J., Baltimore, MD: The John Hopkins University Press.
- *Coping with cerebral palsy: Answers to questions parents ask often.* (1993) Schleichkom, J . Austin, TX: Pro-Ed.
- *The official parent's source book on: Cerebral palsy.* (2002) Parker, J. N., & Parker, P.M. San Diego, CA: ICON Group International, Inc.

Support Groups: (Austin area)

- United Cerebral Palsy of Texas (512) 472-8696.
- United Cerebral Palsy of the Capitol Area, Inc. (512) 834-1827.

Websites:

- United Cerebral Palsy www.ucp.org
- Information on caring for children with cerebral palsy www.caringforcerebralpalsy.com
- Pediatric resources for children with cerebral palsy www.cerebralpalsy.org

References:

Cerebral Palsy. (November 8, 2011). In *MedlinePlus*. Retrieved from: www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/cerebralpalsy.html.