

## FACT SHEET

# Cerebral Palsy

### What is Cerebral Palsy?

Cerebral Palsy is an umbrella term used to describe a group of chronic disorders impairing control of movement that appear in the first few years of life and generally do not worsen over time. The disorders are caused by faulty development of, or damage to motor areas in the brain that disrupts an individual's ability to control movement and posture.

Symptoms of Cerebral Palsy include difficulty with fine motor tasks such as writing or using scissors, difficulty maintaining balance or walking and/or involuntary movements. The symptoms differ from person to person and may change over time. Some people with Cerebral Palsy are also affected by other medical disorders, including seizures or developmental concerns, but Cerebral Palsy does not always cause a developmental handicap. Early signs of Cerebral Palsy usually appear before 3 years of age. Infants with Cerebral Palsy are frequently slow to reach developmental milestones such as learning to roll over, sit, crawl, smile, and walk. Cerebral Palsy may be congenital or acquired after birth. Several of the causes of Cerebral Palsy that have been identified through research which are preventable or treatable include head injuries, jaundice, Rh incompatibility, and rubella (German measles).

### How is it manifested?

- muscle tightness or spasm
- involuntary movement
- disturbance in gait and mobility
- abnormal sensation and perception
- impairment of sight, hearing or speech
- seizures

### Classification By Number of Limbs Involved:

- Quadriplegia- all four limbs are involved.
- Diplegia- all four limbs are involved. Both legs are more severely affected than the arms.
- Hemiplegia-one side of the body is affected. The arm is usually more involved than the leg.
- Triplegia-three limbs are involved, usually both arms and a leg.
- Monoplegia-only one limb is affected, usually an arm.

### Classification By Movement Disorder:

- Spastic Cerebral Palsy is the most common form, affecting 70-80% of individuals with Cerebral Palsy. This type of Cerebral Palsy keeps the muscles in a constant state of increased involuntary reflex.
- Athetoid Cerebral Palsy is characterized by a slow and uncontrolled movement and affects 10-20% of individuals with Cerebral Palsy.
- Ataxic Cerebral Palsy is very rare and affects a person's sense of balance and depth perception. Individuals with this type of Cerebral Palsy often have difficulty with coordination, walk unsteadily with a wide-based gait, placing their feet unusually far apart; and experience difficulty when attempting quick or precise movements, such as writing or buttoning a shirt. Ataxic Cerebral Palsy is diagnosed in approximately 5-10% of individuals with Cerebral Palsy.
- Mixed Forms. It is common for an individual to have symptoms of more than one of the previous three forms. The most common mixed form includes Spastic and Athetoid movements but other combinations are also possible.

### Who is affected?

Cerebral Palsy usually is not diagnosed until a child is about 2 years of age. About 2 to 3 children

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in 1,000 over the age of 3 years have Cerebral Palsy.

### ***How is it diagnosed or detected?***

Cerebral Palsy is diagnosed mainly by evaluating how a baby or young child moves. A physician will evaluate the child's muscle tone, which can make them appear floppy. Some babies have increased muscle tone, which makes them appear stiff, or variable muscle tone (increased at times and low at other times). The physician will check the baby's reflexes and look to see if the baby has developed a preference for using his right or left hand. While most babies do not develop a hand preference (become right- or left-handed) until at least 12 months of age, some babies with Cerebral Palsy do so before six months of age. Another important sign of Cerebral Palsy is the persistence of certain reflexes, called primitive reflexes that are normal in younger infants, but generally disappear by 6 to 12 months of age. The physician also will take a careful medical history, and attempt to rule out any other disorders that could be causing the symptoms.

CAT scans (Computerized Axial Tomography) and MRI (Magnetic Resonance Imaging) can help identify lesions in the brain. This technology may enable some children who are considered at risk of having Cerebral Palsy to be diagnosed very early. However, for the majority of people with Cerebral Palsy it will be months, and sometimes years, before a diagnosis is confirmed.

### **Additional Resources:**

ONTARIO FEDERATION FOR CEREBRAL PALSY

- [www.ofcp.on.ca](http://www.ofcp.on.ca)

The Ontario Federation for Cerebral Palsy is a non-profit, charitable organization with a mandate to address the changing needs of people in Ontario with cerebral palsy.