



A health series to educate families on well-being issues with their children

A collaborative effort of Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh of UPMC and The Pennsylvania Child Welfare Resource Center



UPMC

What Is Cerebral Palsy?

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What is Cerebral Palsy?

- Cerebral palsy (CP) is a general term for a condition in which a child's movement and coordination are permanently affected by a brain injury, but do not get worse over time. This condition is referred to as static encephalopathy (Static = the injury does not change or worsen over time. Encephalopathy = brain injury)
- Most children who have CP are born with it, but sometimes it isn't until they are older that CP is diagnosed. Some children acquire CP after birth due to a car accident or child abuse.
- Children with CP have physical impairment, but the type of impairment can differ a lot in different children. Children can have different types of movement problems and the location and number of limbs involved can be very different depending on the how bad the child's brain injury is.



- Muscle control is affected in children with CP, and some children's muscles contract too much and some contract too little.
- Some children have very subtle impairments in function but are able to attend regular school, while other children are dependent on others for all of their care (eating, toileting, bathing, getting around) and attend special schools.





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What is Cerebral Palsy?

What is the prognosis?

- CP is a spectrum of disease, and some children have more disabilities than others. Some children with CP also have intellectual disabilities, seizures, and problems with vision and hearing.
- CP is a life-long condition.

How is Cerebral Palsy treated?

- While there is no “cure” for CP, there are therapies to help a child achieve his or her highest potential.
- Children with CP are often seen by multiple doctors on a regular basis. It is important that a caretaker be able to keep track of the required appointments, because different doctors take care of different issues. At some hospitals, these appointments are scheduled on the same day to make it easier for families to attend.



- Most children with CP are seen by physical medicine and rehabilitation (PM&R) doctors. PM&R doctors help children maximize their potential in all areas of development. Among other things, PM&R doctors can help fit children with the correct braces and assistive devices such as wheelchairs and communication aids.
- Depending on the level of disability, children with CP sometimes have to see neurologists (brain doctors) to help control seizures or spasticity (extreme muscle tightness). Some children have to see orthopedic (bone) doctors to get surgeries to fix scoliosis (curved back) or other bone problems. Some children require feeding tubes due to feeding problems.

- Children with CP often need therapies such as physical therapy or occupational therapy. It is best to start these therapies as young as possible, and to do them regularly. Physical and occupational therapies help children gain as much mobility as possible, and help adapt their environment according to their disability.





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