

Excerpted from Cerebral Palsy Guidance:

<https://www.cerebralthoughts.com/cerebral-palsy/>

Medically Reviewed and Edited by Gina Jansheski, M.D.

Cerebral palsy (CP) is a neurological condition caused by brain damage and it is the most common motor and movement disability of childhood.

Cerebral palsy causes a range of disabilities, from mild to severe. If your child has been diagnosed with cerebral palsy, you need to know what to expect. Get the answers to all of your questions so that you can make informed decisions about diagnosis, treatment, therapies, and legal action.

What is Cerebral Palsy?

As an umbrella term, cerebral palsy refers to a group of symptoms and disabilities. They are all related but each child will have a unique and individual experience of cerebral palsy.

Some of the potential issues a child with cerebral palsy may face include:

- Movement and walking disabilities
- Speech difficulties
- Learning disabilities
- Cognitive impairments
- Hearing or vision loss
- Epilepsy
- Emotional and behavioral challenges
- Spinal deformities
- Joint problems

Cerebral palsy affects over 500,000 people in the U.S. There is no cure, but treatments and therapies can make a big difference.

CP Quick Facts

- **Cerebral palsy is actually a group of neurological disorders and disabilities, not just one condition, and all can cause some degree of disability in movement, balance, and posture.**
- **Cerebral palsy is the most common movement and motor disability in children. One in approximately 345 kids has CP. [3]**
- **About 80 percent of children with the condition have spastic cerebral palsy, which causes increased muscle tone.**
- **More than half of children diagnosed with cerebral palsy can walk independently.**
- **Most children with CP also have other conditions. Epilepsy is a common co-occurring**

- [condition.](#)
- [The main cause of cerebral palsy is brain damage that occurs in a developing fetus or during birth.](#)
- [Cerebral palsy is more common in boys than in girls.](#)
- [Lifelong Financial Assistance for Your Child's Cerebral Palsy](#)

What Causes Cerebral Palsy?

Brain damage is the cause of CP, but there are many different things that can trigger damage. [4] For this reason, the exact cause of cerebral palsy can't always be determined. Possibilities include:

- Poor brain development in the womb
- Maternal infections or medical conditions
- Disruption of blood flow to the developing brain
- Genetic conditions
- Ingestion of toxins or drugs during pregnancy
- Damage to the head or skull during delivery
- Complications related to premature delivery
- Could My Doctor Be Responsible for My Child's Cerebral Palsy?

Yes, it is possible that negligent medical mistakes caused brain damage during pregnancy or childbirth and lead to cerebral palsy. In some cases errors are not negligent and could not have been prevented; however, negligent mistakes that may be considered malpractice include:

- Anything that deprives a baby of oxygen during birth
- Excessively forceful use of forceps or a vacuum extractor
- Failure to order a Cesarean section or perform one in time to prevent brain damage
- Failure to monitor fetal development during pregnancy or distress during labor
- Inadequate treatment of maternal health conditions during pregnancy

Types of Cerebral Palsy

There are four types of cerebral palsy:

1. Spastic Cerebral Palsy

Spastic cerebral palsy accounts for 75 percent of all cases. It causes increased muscle tone, known as spasticity and causes:

- Delayed developmental milestones for moving.

- Abnormal movements.
- Movement inhibition.
- Stiff and spastic muscles.
- Difficulties controlling muscle movement.
- Difficulties moving from one position to another.
- Spastic quadriplegia impacts a child's upper and lower limbs and body, severely restricting mobility.
- Spastic diplegia only affects the lower half of the body. Many of these children can still walk with some impairments and may need assistive devices such as walkers.
- Spastic hemiplegia affects one side of the body only, usually the arm more than the leg. Most children with hemiplegia can walk.

2. Dyskinetic Cerebral Palsy

Dyskinetic cerebral palsy is the second most common type of CP. Symptoms include:

- Dystonia, repetitive and twisting motions.
- Athetosis, writhing movements.
- Chorea, unpredictable movements.
- Poor posture.
- Painful movements.
- Difficulty swallowing or talking.

3. Ataxic Cerebral Palsy

Ataxic cerebral palsy is the least common. It causes poor balance, limited coordination, tremors, and shaky movements that are difficult to control.

4. Mixed Cerebral Palsy

Mixed cerebral palsy causes symptoms characteristic of two or three of the other types. Spastic-dyskinetic cerebral palsy is the most common type of mixed CP.

How Do I Know if My Child Has Cerebral Palsy?

Some of the signs of cerebral palsy in an infant or toddler are:

- Delays in movements and motor skills, such as holding head up, rolling over, sitting,

- crawling, and walking
- Body parts that are too stiff or floppy
 - Favoring one side of the body
 - Scooting on the bottom instead of crawling
 - Inability to stand, even with support
 - Always consult your child's pediatrician if you notice unusual symptoms, even if you aren't sure they are caused by cerebral palsy. Early intervention is critical when helping children with cerebral palsy.

How is Cerebral Palsy Diagnosed?

There is no single or simple test for cerebral palsy. It takes time and multiple tests and observations to get an accurate diagnosis and to rule out other conditions.

Your pediatrician can either make a diagnosis or recommend a specialist if you suspect your child has any issues with motor development, muscle tone, or coordination and balance.

When diagnosing cerebral palsy, doctors look for spastic movements, abnormal muscle movements, delayed development, and poor coordination. [6]

Can Cerebral Palsy Be Prevented?

There is no foolproof way to prevent CP, but there are steps you can take to lower the risk:

- Before pregnancy, eat well and have any pre-existing medical problems under control.
- While pregnant, continue with these healthy habits and take recommended prenatal vitamins.
- See your obstetrician for regular checkups throughout pregnancy.
- Get screened for potential complications.
- Unfortunately, there is no easy way to predict when an infant will suffer brain damage due to negligence. The best you can do is choose your doctors carefully and advocate for your own healthcare and that of your child.

Can Cerebral Palsy Be Cured?

There is no cure for cerebral palsy, but it will also not get worse with time. This is not a progressive disease, and early therapies and treatments can reduce symptoms and disabilities while also improving mobility.

How Is Cerebral Palsy Treated?

A variety of treatment options can improve symptoms and quality of life for babies and children. Many interventions can be started immediately after a diagnosis is given.

Medications

Various medications help control spastic movements, seizures, relieve pain, and manage other symptoms and related conditions:

- Baclofen or other muscle relaxants
- Diazepam
- Anticonvulsants
- Anticholinergics
- Antacids
- Stool softeners/laxatives
- Sleep aids
- Surgery

Surgery is a critical part of treatment for many children with CP. Surgical procedures may improve mobility or manage pain. Common procedures include tendon or muscle release, the repair of hip dislocations, and scoliosis surgery.

Therapies

Several different types of therapies are used for children and babies with cerebral palsy. They can improve physical, mental, social, and learning deficits. If started early, therapies for cerebral palsy can reduce impairment and lessen the risk of developing other associated conditions.

Common types of therapy used to help children with cerebral palsy are:

- Physical
- Occupational
- Feeding
- Aqua
- Horse and animal
- Music
- Play
- Behavioral
- Speech/Language
- Bowel program

What is the Life Expectancy for Cerebral Palsy?

Many children diagnosed with cerebral palsy have the same life expectancy as any other. This wasn't always true, but earlier diagnosis and better therapies have improved many health conditions for these children.

While CP does not usually shorten life expectancy, it does require early intervention and good medical care for the best outcomes. This is especially true for those with severe disabilities.

Some of the conditions associated with cerebral palsy can be life-threatening if not treated. These include breathing and swallowing difficulties (which can cause pneumonia or malnutrition), seizures, chronic nutritional deficiencies, or life-threatening pressure infections.

Will Cerebral Palsy Cause Other Health Problems?

Cerebral palsy does not necessarily cause other conditions, but a number of health issues often co-occur with it. Many kids with CP have at least one co-existing condition:

- Hearing deficits
- Vision impairment
- Seizures
- Cognitive disability
- ADHD
- Behavioral, emotional issues
- Feeding problems and nutritional deficiencies
- Gastric reflux
- Constipation
- Scoliosis
- Joint problems
- Sleep disorders

What is the Prognosis for Cerebral Palsy?

The prognosis for cerebral palsy depends on individual factors, but except in severe cases, it is possible for most children to grow up to live a normal life. Many children with cerebral palsy have average or above-average intelligence and are mobile with or without assistance.

Most children with CP go to school with their peers. They may need special education accommodations, such as assistance with communication, hearing or vision aids, and speech and language therapy.

Most children with CP grow up to function as independent adults. Those with more severe disabilities may need lifelong care and supervision.

What If I Can't Afford My Child's Care?

The care required for a child with special needs can be costly. According to the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR), the average cost is \$921,000. This doesn't include out-of-pocket expenses or lost wages. If you find yourself struggling, there are several options to try:

- Your child may qualify for cash assistance from the government. This falls under section 111.000 of the Social Security disability insurance program. [10]
- Those approved for cash assistance from the Social Security Administration (SSA) usually also qualify for full medical insurance at little to no charge.
- You may also qualify for free or reduced child care under the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA) or educational assistance under the Individuals with Disabilities Act of 2004.
- If your child's cerebral palsy was caused by medical negligence, you have the option to file for compensation from the responsible party through legal action.

How Do I Know if My Child's Cerebral Palsy Was Caused by Medical Negligence?

Medical negligence occurs when a doctor or another healthcare professional cause preventable harm to a patient by failing to provide an accepted standard of care. Incidents in which negligence may have caused CP include but are not limited to:

- A doctor failing to diagnose a maternal condition that led to brain injuries.
- A doctor, nurse, or other healthcare professional failing to monitor and treat maternal or fetal distress.
- Improper use of tools to assist in the birthing process.
- The doctor failing to schedule emergency C-section when indicated by fetal distress.
- A doctor failing to detect and treat infant hypoxia, jaundice or infection, leading to brain damage.
- Malpractice cases are complicated. There has to be enough evidence just to start a case. Specific guidelines set by state laws have to be met first. Only a qualified lawyer or law firm with malpractice experience can tell you if you have a case.

What is the United Cerebral Palsy?

United Cerebral Palsy (UCP) is a non-profit organization that helps people with cerebral palsy. Assistance from UCP comes from over 80 national affiliates and includes help with transportation, housing, recreational activities, traveling, health awareness, assistive technologies, advocacy in education, and more.

According to the official UCP site, “UCP educates, advocates and provides support services to ensure a life without limits for people with a spectrum of disabilities. UCP works to advance the independence, productivity and full citizenship of people with disabilities through an affiliate network that has helped millions.”

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the main cause of cerebral palsy?

The main, underlying cause of cerebral palsy is damage or an abnormality in the brain that disrupts normal development. There are many potential causes of brain damage, from maternal infections that impact fetal development to lack of oxygen during labor and delivery, to an accident that causes traumatic brain injury in a baby. The causes can be broadly categorized as congenital and acquired. Congenital causes occur during fetal development, birth, or shortly after birth, while acquired causes are events that occur a month or more after birth.

Can you walk with cerebral palsy?

The symptoms and disabilities associated with cerebral palsy vary from one individual to another and depend on the severity of the initial brain injury or abnormality. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, between 50 and 60 percent of children with cerebral palsy are able to walk independently. Approximately ten percent need a handheld device for mobility, such as a walker. About 30 percent of children with cerebral palsy cannot walk or can walk only with severe limitations.

How long can you live with cerebral palsy?

The life expectancy of a child with cerebral palsy varies greatly by individual because there is so much variety in symptoms and associated conditions. Those with mild cerebral palsy are likely to have the same life expectancy as the general population. Life expectancy goes down as the severity of the condition increases. The most common causes of death in people with cerebral palsy are respiratory problems, including aspiration and pneumonia.

Can you get cerebral palsy later in life?

The majority of cases of cerebral palsy are congenital, meaning the brain damage that causes the condition occurred during pregnancy, birth, or shortly after birth. Some studies have shown that between 10 and 15 percent of cases were acquired and occurred in the first few years of a child's life. The leading causes in these cases were car accidents that caused brain injury and infections like meningitis. Adults do not develop cerebral palsy.

Can a child grow out of cerebral palsy?

Cerebral palsy is a permanent condition and there is no cure. However, cerebral palsy is also not progressive, which means it does not get worse over time. Some of the associated conditions may worsen. Treatments cannot cure cerebral palsy, but they can improve symptoms, functioning, and quality of life.

Does cerebral palsy get worse with age?

Cerebral palsy is not a progressive disease. It does not get worse with age. However, the co-occurring, or associated conditions that many people with cerebral palsy have can get worse. Associated conditions may include epilepsy, osteoarthritis, hearing and vision loss, incontinence, malnutrition, dental problems, and speech and language disorders. Appropriate treatments can manage these conditions and prevent them from getting worse.

Can cerebral palsy be cured?

There is no cure for cerebral palsy, but there are many treatments that relieve symptoms, manage associated conditions, and improve function and quality of life. For instance, surgery can reduce pain and improve mobility but is unlikely to restore complete function and movement.

What is the best treatment for cerebral palsy?

The best treatment for cerebral palsy is a combination of strategies that best meet the needs of an individual. Because there is so much variety in symptoms and associated conditions, there is no single treatment or best treatment for cerebral palsy. Some of the typical treatments that may be used include medications, surgery, physical therapy, occupational therapy, speech and language therapy, and educational interventions.

Does cerebral palsy affect intelligence?

An intellectual disability is a potential associated condition of cerebral palsy. Many children will have normal or above average intelligence, while some will have a disability and lower IQ. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, more than 40 percent of children with cerebral palsy have some degree of intellectual disability.

Can you live a normal life with cerebral palsy?

Whether or not a child will be able to live a normal life with cerebral palsy depends on the severity of the condition. Those with mild symptoms and disabilities live much like healthy children with the same life expectancy and ability to be independent as adults. More severely disabled children still may live independently later if they have the right treatments, therapies and support. Some children, those with the most severe disabilities, will need lifelong care.

MEDICALLY REVIEWED AND EDITED BY GINA JANSHESKI, M.D.

Gina Jansheski, M.D. is a Board Certified Pediatrician and a Fellow of the American Academy of Pediatrics. She has been a practicing pediatrician for over 20 years, working primarily with hospitalized patients and children with special needs.

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