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Cerebral Palsy

Also called: CP

What is cerebral palsy (CP)?

Cerebral palsy (CP) is a group of neurologic disorders [<https://medlineplus.gov/neurologicdiseases.html>] that cause problems with movement [<https://medlineplus.gov/movementdisorders.html>] , balance [<https://medlineplus.gov/balanceproblems.html>] , and posture. The first part of the name, cerebral, means having to do with the brain. The second part, palsy, means weakness or problems with using the muscles.

CP can range from mild to severe. The brain damage and the disabilities [<https://medlineplus.gov/disabilities.html>] it causes are permanent. But treatments can improve the lives of people who have the condition. For example, treatments can help to improve their motor skills and ability to communicate.

What are the types of cerebral palsy (CP)?

There are different types of CP:

- **Spastic cerebral palsy**, which is the most common type. It causes increased muscle tone, stiff muscles, and awkward movements. Sometimes it only affects one part of the body. In other cases, it can affect both arms and legs, the trunk, and the face.
- **Dyskinetic cerebral palsy**, which causes problems controlling the movement of the hands, arms, feet, and legs. This can make it hard to sit and walk.
- **Ataxic cerebral palsy**, which causes problems with balance and coordination.
- **Mixed cerebral palsy**, which means that you have symptoms of more than one type.

What causes cerebral palsy (CP)?

CP is caused by abnormal development or damage to the developing brain. When this development or damage happens before birth, it is called congenital CP. Most CP is congenital, and its causes may include:

- Gene changes (variants)
- Brain malformations [<https://medlineplus.gov/brainmalformations.html>]
- Infections [<https://medlineplus.gov/infectionsandpregnancy.html>] or fevers in the pregnant parent
- An injury to the developing baby

CP can also happen during or after birth. CP that happens more than 28 days after birth is called acquired CP. Its causes can include:

- Brain damage in the first few months or years of life
- Infections, such as meningitis [<https://medlineplus.gov/meningitis.html>] or encephalitis [<https://medlineplus.gov/encephalitis.html>]
- Problems with blood flow to the brain, for example from a stroke [<https://medlineplus.gov/stroke.html>] or abnormal blood vessels
- Head injuries [<https://medlineplus.gov/headinjuries.html>] , for example from a car accident, a fall [<https://medlineplus.gov/falls.html>] , or child abuse [<https://medlineplus.gov/childabuse.html>]

In some cases, the cause of congenital or acquired CP is unknown.

Who is more likely to develop cerebral palsy (CP)?

Certain medical conditions or events that can happen during pregnancy

[<https://medlineplus.gov/healthproblemsinpregnancy.html>] and delivery [<https://medlineplus.gov/childbirth.html>] may increase a baby's risk of congenital cerebral palsy. These may include:

- Being born too small [<https://medlineplus.gov/birthweight.html>]
- Being born too early [<https://medlineplus.gov/prematurebabies.html>]
- Being born a twin or other multiple birth [<https://medlineplus.gov/twintripletsmultiplebirths.html>]
- Being conceived by in vitro fertilization (IVF) or other assisted reproductive technology [<https://medlineplus.gov/assistedreproductivetechnology.html>] (ART)
- Infections [<https://medlineplus.gov/infectionsandpregnancy.html>]
- Health problems in the pregnant parent, such as thyroid problems [<https://medlineplus.gov/thyroiddiseases.html>] and seizures [<https://medlineplus.gov/seizures.html>]
- Severe newborn jaundice [<https://medlineplus.gov/jaundice.html>]
- Having complications during birth [<https://medlineplus.gov/childbirthproblems.html>]
- Rh incompatibility [<https://medlineplus.gov/rhcompatibility.html>]
- Exposure to toxic chemicals during pregnancy [<https://medlineplus.gov/reproductivehazards.html>]

What are the signs of cerebral palsy (CP)?

There are many different types and levels of disability with CP. So the signs can be different in each child. These signs usually appear in the early months of life. They may include:

- Developmental delays. Your child may be slow to reach developmental milestones such as learning to roll over, sit, crawl, or walk.
- Abnormal muscle tone. Your child may seem floppy, or they may be stiff or rigid.
- An unusual posture or favoring one side of the body when reaching, crawling, or moving.
- Stiff or tight muscles and exaggerated reflexes (spasticity).
- Shaking (tremor [<https://medlineplus.gov/tremor.html>]) of arms, legs, hands, or feet.
- Sudden, uncontrolled movements.

It's important to know that children without CP can also have these signs. Contact your child's health care provider if your child has any of these signs, so you can get a correct diagnosis.

How is cerebral palsy (CP) diagnosed?

Diagnosing CP involves several steps:

- **Developmental monitoring** (or surveillance) means tracking a child's growth and development over time. If there are any concerns about your child's development, they should have a developmental screening test as soon as possible.
- **Developmental screening** involves giving your child a short test to check for motor, movement, or other developmental delays. If the screenings are not normal, the provider will recommend more evaluations.
- **Developmental and medical evaluations** are done to diagnose which disorder your child has. To make the diagnosis, your provider:
 - Will check your child's motor skills, muscle tone, reflexes, and posture
 - Will ask about their medical history
 - May order lab tests, genetic tests [<https://medlineplus.gov/genetictesting.html>], and/or imaging tests [<https://medlineplus.gov/diagnosticimaging.html>]

What are the treatments for cerebral palsy (CP)?

There is no cure for CP, but treatment can improve the lives of those who have it. It is important to begin a treatment program as early as possible.

A team of health professionals will work with you and your child to develop a treatment plan. Common treatments include:

- Medicines
- Surgery
- Assistive devices [<https://medlineplus.gov/assistivedevices.html>] such as braces and walkers
- Physical, occupational, recreational, and speech therapy

Can cerebral palsy (CP) be prevented?

You cannot prevent the genetic problems that can cause CP. But it may be possible to manage or avoid some of the risk factors for CP. For example:

- If you are pregnant, make sure that you are vaccinated [<https://medlineplus.gov/vaccines.html>] against infections that could cause CP in your developing baby.
- Get regular prenatal care [<https://medlineplus.gov/prenatalcare.html>], which can reduce the risk of preterm birth or having a low birthweight baby. It can also help you manage any health conditions that could raise the risk of CP.
- Use car seats for your baby to prevent head injuries that could cause CP.

Start Here

- About Cerebral Palsy [<https://www.cdc.gov/cerebral-palsy/about/>] (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)
- Cerebral Palsy [<https://www.ninds.nih.gov/health-information/disorders/cerebral-palsy>]
 (National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke)
- Cerebral Palsy (CP) [<https://www.cdc.gov/cerebral-palsy/>] (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)

Symptoms

- Hypotonic Cerebral Palsy [<https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/hypotonic-cp.html>] (Nemours Foundation) - **In English and Spanish**
Also in Spanish [<https://kidshealth.org/es/parents/hypotonic-cp.html>]

Treatments and Therapies

- Botulinum Toxin Injections: A Treatment for Muscle Spasms [<https://familydoctor.org/botulinum-toxin-injections-a-treatment-for-muscle-spasms/?adfree=true>] (American Academy of Family Physicians)
Also in Spanish [<https://es.familydoctor.org/inyecciones-de-toxina-botulinica-para-espasmos-musculares/?adfree=true>]
- Hypotonic Cerebral Palsy [<https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/hypotonic-cp.html>] (Nemours Foundation) - **In English and Spanish**
Also in Spanish [<https://kidshealth.org/es/parents/hypotonic-cp.html>]

Related Issues

- Dressing with Ease, Style, and Comfort [<https://www.als.org/navigating-als/resources/fyi-dressing-ease-style-and-comfort>] (ALS Association)

Specifics

- Ataxic Cerebral Palsy [<https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/ataxic-cp.html>] (Nemours Foundation)
Also in Spanish [<https://kidshealth.org/es/parents/ataxic-cp.html>]
- Dyskinetic Cerebral Palsy [<https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/dyskinetic-cp.html>] (Nemours Foundation)
Also in Spanish [<https://kidshealth.org/es/parents/dyskinetic-cp.html>]
- Spastic Cerebral Palsy [<https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/spastic-cp.html>] (Nemours Foundation)
Also in Spanish [<https://kidshealth.org/es/parents/spastic-cp.html>]

Clinical Trials

- ClinicalTrials.gov: Cerebral Palsy [<https://clinicaltrials.gov/search?cond=%22Cerebral+Palsy%22&aggFilters=status:not%20rec>]  (National Institutes of Health)

Journal Articles

References and abstracts from MEDLINE/PubMed (National Library of Medicine)

- Article: Comparative Effects of Partial Body Weight-Supported and Loaded Treadmill Training on... [https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/40731755]
- Article: Repetitive transcranial magnetic stimulation influences cognitive-motor dual-task performance in children with... [https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/40684180]
- Article: Effects of transcranial direct current stimulation and mirror therapy on mental... [https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/40640762]
- Cerebral Palsy -- see more articles [https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/?term=%22Cerebral+Palsy%22%5Bmajr%3Anoexp%5D+AND+humans%5Bmh%5D+AND+english%5Bla%5D+AND+%22last+1+Year%22%5Bdat%5D+AND+%28patient+education+handout%5Bpt%5D+OR+guideline%5Bpt%5D+OR+clinical+trial%5Bpt%5D%29++NOT+%28letter%5Bpt%5D+OR+case+reports%5Bpt%5D+OR+editorial%5Bpt%5D+OR+comment%5Bpt%5D%29+AND+free+full+text%5Bsb%5D+]

Reference Desk

- Hypertonia [https://www.ninds.nih.gov/health-information/disorders/glossary-neurological-terms#hypertonia]  (National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke)
- Spasticity [https://www.ninds.nih.gov/health-information/disorders/glossary-neurological-terms#spasticity]  (National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke)

Find an Expert

- March of Dimes Foundation [https://www.marchofdimes.org/] Also in Spanish [https://nacersano.marchofdimes.org/]
- National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke [https://www.ninds.nih.gov/] 

Children

- Caring for Your Child with Cerebral Palsy (CP): Ages 6-12 [https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/cp-checklist-big-kids.html]  (Nemours Foundation)
Also in Spanish [https://kidshealth.org/es/parents/cp-checklist-big-kids.html]
- Caring for Your Child with CP: Birth to Age 5 [https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/cp-checklist-younger.html] (Nemours Foundation)
Also in Spanish [https://kidshealth.org/es/parents/cp-checklist-younger.html]
- Cerebral Palsy (For Parents) [https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/cerebral-palsy.html] (Nemours Foundation)
Also in Spanish [https://kidshealth.org/es/parents/cerebral-palsy.html]
- Dietary Needs for Kids With Cerebral Palsy [https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/diet-cerebral-palsy.html] (Nemours Foundation)
Also in Spanish [https://kidshealth.org/es/parents/diet-cerebral-palsy.html]

Teenagers

- Caring for Your Teen With Cerebral Palsy (CP): Age 13 and Up [https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/cp-checklist-teens.html] (Nemours Foundation)
Also in Spanish [https://kidshealth.org/es/parents/cp-checklist-teens.html]

Patient Handouts

- Cerebral palsy [https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/000716.htm] (Medical Encyclopedia)
Also in Spanish [https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/article/000716.htm]
- Swallowing problems [https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000065.htm] (Medical Encyclopedia)
Also in Spanish [https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/patientinstructions/000065.htm]



MEDICAL ENCYCLOPEDIA

Cerebral palsy [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/000716.htm>]

Swallowing problems [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000065.htm>]

National Institutes of Health

The primary NIH organization for research on *Cerebral Palsy* is the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke [<http://www.ninds.nih.gov/>]

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