



## An OAASIS information Sheet

Office for Advice Assistance Support and Information on Special needs

Helpline 0800 902 0732

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Initially called Little's Disease, after the English surgeon William Little who first wrote about it in the mid 19th century, **Cerebral Palsy** (CP) is a blanket term for a number of disorders which affect muscles and movement.

If that part of the brain which controls movement is injured or fails to develop properly, a child may be born with or develop CP. At present there appears to be no single cause for CP, but medical research indicates that damage to the developing foetus from a viral infection, certain drugs, poor nutrition or prematurity may be a strong factor. To a lesser degree, low birthweight, lack of oxygen or injury to the brain before, during or just after birth, or cerebral bleed, may also be attributable. Meningitis or encephalitis in early childhood can also be a cause. It is thought that CP affects 1 in every 400 children (about 1,800 babies are diagnosed with CP in Britain each year).

### Spastic CP

This is the most common form of CP. The person will have very stiff muscles and a decreased range of jerky movements making the most basic of activities extremely hard work.

If it affects just one half of the body it is described as **hemiplegic**. If both legs are affected (but not the arms) it is **diplegic**. If both legs and arms are affected, it is **quadriplegic**.

### Athetoid or Dyskinetic CP

This type of CP by itself is quite rare. The person will have frequent involuntary muscle movements because their muscles rapidly change from floppy to tense in a way they can't control. They may have difficulties controlling the tongue; unintentional movements of the face, arms and upper body; diaphragm (breathing) and vocal cords and hearing problems may also be present. Their speech may be difficult to understand until you get to know them well.

### Ataxia CP

This affects the whole body. Balance and coordination are affected and the person will probably be unsteady when walking. They will experience extreme shakiness and have jerky hand movements and speech.

Many people with CP will have a combination of the three types. As with many neuro-developmental disorders, CP can affect people in widely different degrees of severity. No two people will be the same but, as always, try to see the person and not the condition.

### Physical and mental characteristics

A child who has CP may have or develop some – not all – of the following, to some degree:

- limited movements
- uncontrolled movements
- muscle weakness
- muscle stiffness
- muscle spasm
- muscle floppiness
- speech problems
- hearing difficulties
- chewing/swallowing difficulties
- epilepsy
- a squint
- visual problems

### Treatment

A child born with cerebral palsy will always have cerebral palsy. It is not an illness, it is not contagious, it does not get worse, but on the other hand neither does it diminish with age. There are treatments and therapies which will help alleviate some of the symptoms of CP, and much can be done to help children become more independent. Above all, your patience, understanding and willingness to look beyond the disorder will be well rewarded.

As with other neurological disorders, a multi-disciplinary approach is advised. Children may need help from a range of professionals, including physio-, occupational and speech and language therapists, and educational psychologists. Some children will need walkers, wheelchairs or protective head-wear; some will need specially

adapted knives, forks, spoons and writing equipment. For those whose speech is hard for others to understand, a communication aid is vital, whether this is a set of simple cards with words/pictures, or a sophisticated electronic speaking device.

In addition, there are more specific medical interventions such as the use of Botox injections, and in more extreme cases, surgery, that might achieve improvements in movement and communication.

**Teachers** should be aware that learning difficulties may be present, but this is not the rule: many children with CP have average intelligence and some may have above average intelligence. If there are learning difficulties present, these may range – as in any population – from mild through moderate to specific or severe. Perceptual or spatial difficulties are not uncommon, but are not always picked up.



## USEFUL CONTACTS

### SCOPE

Helpline (Scope Response): 0808 800 3333

Scope is a national disability organisation focussing on cerebral palsy providing a range of services in early years, education, and independent living and employment opportunities. Also run local support services and a parent befriending scheme.

Email: [response@scope.org.uk](mailto:response@scope.org.uk)

Website: [www.scope.org.uk](http://www.scope.org.uk)

### Advance: The Centre for the Scotson Technique

East Grinstead, W Sussex

Tel: 01342 311137

Uses The Scotson Technique, restorative neurology for children and young people which restores critical respiratory and circulatory needs of the brain after brain injury. Gentle home exercises are taught to parents.

Email: [info@advancecentres.com](mailto:info@advancecentres.com)

Website: [www.advancecentres.com](http://www.advancecentres.com)

### The Bobath Centre for Children with Cerebral Palsy

London

Tel: 0208 444 3355

Offers neuro-developmental treatment for children and adults with CP and acquired neurological conditions.

They also have centres in Wales and Scotland.

Website: [www.bobath.org.uk](http://www.bobath.org.uk)

### Capability Scotland

Edinburgh

Tel ASCS: 0131 313 5510

Capability Scotland provides flexible services to children, young people and adults with a range of disabilities and their families and carers. They also run ASCS (Advice Service Capability Scotland) which gives advice and information on a range of issues, including Cerebral Palsy.

Email: [ascs@capability-scotland.org.uk](mailto:ascs@capability-scotland.org.uk)

Website: [www.capability-scotland.org.uk](http://www.capability-scotland.org.uk)

### Cedar Foundation

Belfast

Email: [info@cedar-foundation.org](mailto:info@cedar-foundation.org)

Tel: 028 9066 6188

Covering Northern Ireland, the children and young people's service offers a range of programmes providing information and support for children with disabilities.

Website: [www.cedar-foundation.org](http://www.cedar-foundation.org)

### The National Institute for Conductive Education

Birmingham

Tel: 0121 449 1569

A charity for children and adults with incurable movement disabilities, offers more independence and dignity by teaching them how to overcome their disability in everyday life.

Website: [www.conductive-education.org.uk](http://www.conductive-education.org.uk)

### Scottish Centre for Children with Motor Impairments

Tel: 01236 456100

Provides a day school and outreach to children across Scotland who have CP, based on conductive education and the Scottish Curriculum.

Website: [www.craigalbert.org.uk](http://www.craigalbert.org.uk)

## USEFUL INTERNET SITES

As well as the above, see the following for helpful information and articles:

[http://www.ninds.nih.gov/disorders/cerebral\\_palsy/detail\\_cerebral\\_palsy.htm](http://www.ninds.nih.gov/disorders/cerebral_palsy/detail_cerebral_palsy.htm) the USA's National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke.

[www.specialabilities.co.uk](http://www.specialabilities.co.uk) a website set up by Gillian Archbold, a parent, and Sabrina, her daughter with CP. They offer support, advice, information booklets and training. Has a fun section for children to access called Kidzaware at [www.kidzaware.co.uk](http://www.kidzaware.co.uk).

## READING

### See also OAASIS information sheet 'Books – where to find them'

Refer to the above contacts for their publication lists, and, as new books on childhood disorders and learning difficulties are coming out faster than ever before; contact -

### Routledge Education

(member of the Taylor Francis Group)

Tel: 020 7017 6563 (Marketing)

Website: [www.routledgeeducation.com](http://www.routledgeeducation.com)

(academic and research based) or

[www.routledgegeteachers.com](http://www.routledgegeteachers.com) for teachers/parents.

### Jessica Kingsley Publishers

Website: [www.jkp.com](http://www.jkp.com)

Email: [post@jkp.com](mailto:post@jkp.com)

Tel: 020 7833 2307

### The internet book shop

[www.amazon.co.uk](http://www.amazon.co.uk)

OAASIS produces a wide range of free Information Sheets, 8 publications entitled 'First Guide to...' and wallet sized cards explaining 9 learning disabilities.

Please contact OAASIS (see front of sheet for contact details) for the full list, or view and download them on the website at

[www.oaasis.co.uk](http://www.oaasis.co.uk).

All sheets are checked and amended annually. Please ensure you have the current version.