

## General Information About Cerebral Palsy (CP)

### WHAT IS CEREBRAL PALSY (CP)?

The words Cerebral Palsy (CP) really mean brain paralysis. CP is caused by damage to the brain. This causes different problems in the body and in how it works.

People with CP have different types of physical problems, which means that it is difficult to balance and move as other people do.

Some people with CP also have speech problems as well.

Some people with CP also have learning disability as well.

Some people have all three of these types of problems. If they have them very seriously, they will have a lot of difficulty in moving, communication and in day to day activities: they will need a lot of care.

Some people with CP also have epilepsy.

### WHAT ARE THE SIGNS OF CP?

Cerebral Palsy affects different people in different ways. This depends on which part of the brain is damaged and how much.

Usually the categories of mild moderate and severe are used to describe how big the problems are.

In the body, the movement/balance problem can sometimes be on one side (arm and leg) only; in legs only or in the whole body.

The family will often say that the child was later than others of the same age in holding up the head, sitting, standing and walking or may not be able to do these like children of the same age.

### There are three main types of problem in the body/limbs caused by CP:

- Spasticity this is when the muscles of the arms, legs, or whole body are very tight. This means it is hard for the person to move them by their own idea (see module on spasticity).
- Athetoid with this, the person's arms and legs, and sometimes body, will move in an uncontrolled way. Often the more the person tries to move by their own idea, the more the extra movements come as well.
- Ataxia this is a type of CP where there is neither of the other two problems but there are balance problems. This is less common than the other two.

How able the child becomes is often difficult to predict at an early age. Parents usually want the child to be able to walk and talk. Some children with CP will be able to learn to walk, but some will not be able to. They may use special sticks or walker equipment.



### Centre for Disability in Development (CDD)

D-55/3, Talbag, Savar, Dhaka-1340, Bangladesh, Phone: 880-2-7711379, 7711467

Email: [cdd@bangla.net](mailto:cdd@bangla.net), Website: [www.cdd.org.bd](http://www.cdd.org.bd)

Sometimes the speech of someone with CP may be difficult to understand whenever possible, the advice of a speech and language therapist should be taken. These specialists should also be involved if the child has a problem with feeding, which is quite common in CP chewing and swallowing may be difficult.

In many cases, the person with CP may look stupid and not intelligent but this is due only to the speech problem. It is very important to observe their eye movements, their responses by moving limbs or their body, and other sounds they may make. In many cases there is a very intelligent person who has a body which is very limited in ability. They need ways to learn and communicate, to get the best quality of life. For example, some people who were thought to be stupid and not given chances to learn early in life, have later been found to be very intelligent and even written books about their experiences.

## WHAT ARE THE CAUSES OF CP?

CP is caused by damage to the brain, which can be from different causes. The most common are:

- unknown causes
- A known or unknown problem during pregnancy, such as malnutrition of the mother, illness, taking unprescribed medicines, or an accident.
- A difficult or long delivery, without good medical care and help as needed.
- A delivery when the baby has the cord tight round the neck, and it reduces the blood supply to the head.
- An illness such as meningitis, encephalitis, jaundice, malaria or other with high fever, or a head injury, which are before the age of two this can also lead to problems like CP.

(Note: sometimes in pregnancy the woman tries to do an abortion (operation, medicine) to get rid of the baby. Sometimes this works, but sometimes it does not the baby does not die but is damaged. So, in these cases, this is the cause of the CP. This is obviously a very sensitive and difficult issue. The family will need a lot of

support to care for the child. In the author s experience, sometimes the mother will say that this is the cause when she trusts the CW and has a good relationship with them. This is very personal information and should not be told to others. Also the mother should not be blamed, even if this was the situation. She still needs support, even if you may not agree with what she tried to do. The author has seen families where this is the cause but the child still receives much love and care.)

## CAN CP BE PREVENTED?

Not all cases of CP can be prevented. But many things can be done to decrease the risks:

- the nutritional state and health of the woman who becomes pregnant, during the pregnancy, the care during the delivery, and afterwards (for example, to avoid heavy work in pregnancy)
- health care facilities available, including immunizations and good treatment of childhood illnesses



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- social traditions and beliefs (such as about diet, treatment of some illnesses, and situation of women and female children, etc)
- accident prevention
- general health, hygiene and nutrition within the community

### **CAN CP BE CURED? DOES IT GET BETTER OR WORSE? CAN EXTRA PROBLEMS COME?**

CP cannot be cured, but the amount of damage to the brain will not get worse.

However, it may appear that the child is getting worse as he/she gets older and may be doing less compared to others of the same age.

With good advice and support, given as early as possible, the child has the best chance to learn things and develop movement skills. Also, the family gets the most support as well.

How much the child can progress depends on many factors, and if she/he has a learning disability then improvement will take longer.

If the child and family do not get the proper advice and help, then almost certainly extra problems will, come: such as contractures (less movement in the joints), pressure sores, a bent spine, and lack of chance to learn how to move normally. These problems can be just as disabling as the CP itself, so it is best to avoid them if at all possible (see modules on contractures, spinal deformity, and spasticity).

### **CAN OTHER PEOPLE CATCH IT? CAN IT BE PASSED ON FROM PARENTS TO CHILDREN?**

CP cannot spread from one person to another. Generally it is not passed on from parents to children. There are a few families who have two children with CP: they may be twins or from different births. But, this is rare. Usually the brothers and sisters of someone with CP do not have CP. Sometimes with twins one of them has CP, the other does not.

### **CAN A PERSON WITH CP GO TO SCHOOL, GET A JOB AND GET MARRIED AND HAVE CHILDREN?**

Most children with CP can learn as well as any other child. They should go to an ordinary school with extra support for the teacher and often special equipment as well.

If the child has a learning disability then he/she will need more support to be in school, but it can still be possible.

If the child has severe physical and learning disabilities then it will be hard for them to go to an ordinary school a special unit in an ordinary school is best for them.

People with CP are able to do many different kinds of work, depending on their abilities, skills and interests.



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Also, many people with CP get married and have children. Especially if it is the mother who has CP, she may need some extra support during the pregnancy, delivery and afterwards.

### **HOW CAN A DOCTOR HELP? IS IT NECESSARY TO GO TO A SPECIALIST? IS THE TREATMENT VERY EXPENSIVE? IS EQUIPMENT NEEDED?**

Usually the person with CP does not have need to go to the Doctor, except in these cases:

- if he/she is ill like anyone else
- if she/he has epilepsy which need medicine to control the fits
- if special advice is needed e.g. for speech problems or to see the orthopaedic doctor

The most effective treatment for CP is exercises and positioning, so that the person has the best chance to learn how to move and balance him/her self. This treatment is usually done by the person themselves and their family, so is not expensive.

Sometimes it may be recommended for the person with CP to have expensive tests: these will not help the person to get better, so the cost should be carefully considered.

Sometimes people with CP may have operations to lengthen muscles which are tight. These may help some people, for others in a few months they will be the same again. So, good advice is needed before and follow up is needed afterwards. An operation can also be costly.

For many people with CP, equipment can help, for:

- positioning: e.g. chairs, splints, wedges, rolls
- movement: e.g. wheelchair, crutches, sticks, trolley, walker (with or without wheels)
- communication (for some): e.g. picture board

### **HOW CAN THE COMMUNITY DISABILITY WORKER (CDW) HELP?**

The CW is important for advising the person and family about the CP, and also:

- to help to learn maximum ability in day to day activities
- to help with exercises and positioning/equipment to either reduce spasticity, to help control unwanted movement, or to develop balance and coordination (depending on the type of CP that it is)
- to prevent extra problems developing
- to help with communication if needed
- to help with feeding problems if needed
- to encourage the family to include the person as much as possible
- to help with education and work opportunities.
- do awareness in the community about causes and prevention of CP
- to encourage the family especially if the person has quite severe multiple disability (e.g. CP + learning disability + sensory problem as well)



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## HOW CAN THE FAMILY HELP?

The family should:

- Encourage the person to do as much as he or she can for themselves.
- To help them do exercises, positioning and moving
- assist in learning new activities, and in getting education and work
- include the person in family and social activities

## HOW CAN THE PERSON WITH CP HELP HIM/HERSELF?

The person can best help themselves by:

- following the advice of the CW , and try to be as active as they can
- prevent the extra disabilities by good positioning and regular exercises
- to be motivated to get out and about in the community

How much they can do for themselves really depends on the type and amount of physical and mental problems. But if the family do everything for them, they also will have no opportunity to learn. They should try for themselves, to have practice of movements and activity.

## HOW CAN THE COMMUNITY HELP?

**The community can help by:**

- including the person as much as possible
- knowing about causes of CP and doing prevention activities
- general good facilities for health care
- General good roads, paths etc to help getting out and about.
- Making equipment if possible
- Helping funding if any equipment or training is needed

**Other related modules:**

- spasticity
- epilepsy
- learning disability
- communication
- contractures
- spinal deformity



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