



Health Awareness

Why It's Important To Learn About Cerebral Palsy Today; Learn The Signs And What To Do If You Think Your Child Might Have It

(NAPS)—We all know the importance of making sure a child is healthy, but parents may not be aware of the signs and symptoms of major developmental disabilities, such as cerebral palsy (CP). CP, the most common cause of motor disability in childhood, is a group of disorders that affects a person's ability to move and keep his or her balance and posture. Cerebral means having to do with the brain. Palsy means weakness or problems with using the muscles. The symptoms of CP vary from person to person. A child may simply be a little clumsy or awkward or unable to walk at all.

CP is caused by damage to or abnormal development of one or more parts of the brain that control movement. The damage or abnormality happens during pregnancy, near the time of delivery or early in life. The part of the brain that is damaged determines what parts of the body are affected. CP itself is not progressive—the brain damage or abnormality does not get worse as the child gets older; however, the physical characteristics can change over a person's lifetime. Depending on which areas of the brain are affected, one or more of the following may occur: muscle tightness; involuntary movement; difficulty in walking; difficulty in swallowing; and problems with speech.

A recent study supported by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention shows the average prevalence of CP as 3.6 per 1,000



The main sign of cerebral palsy is a delay in reaching the motor or movement milestones.

children or about 1 in 278 children. This study of the prevalence and characteristics of CP is from Georgia, Alabama and Wisconsin. All sites reported the highest prevalence among boys, Blacks and those living in low- and middle-income neighborhoods. Prevalence rates were lowest among Hispanic children.

The signs of CP vary greatly because there are many different types and levels of disability. The main sign that your child might have CP is a delay in reaching motor or movement milestones:

A child over 2 months old with CP might:

- have difficulty holding the head upright when picked up

- have stiff legs that cross or "scissor" when picked up.

A child over 6 months old with CP might:

- have difficulty bringing hands together
- reach with only one hand while keeping the other in a fist.

A child over 10 months old with CP might:

- crawl by pushing off with one hand and leg while dragging the opposite hand and leg
- not sit by himself or herself.

A child over 12 months old with CP might:

- not crawl
- not be able to stand with support.

A child over 24 months old with CP might:

- not be able to walk
- not be able to push a toy with wheels.

If you see any of these signs, call your child's doctor or nurse. If you or your doctor has concerns about CP, you can seek the help of a specialist such as a developmental pediatrician or child neurologist and you can contact an early-intervention agency (for children under 3) or public school (for children 3 and older). For information about resources in your area, contact the National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities by logging on to www.nichcy.org/ or calling 1 (800) 695-0285. You can log on to www.reachingforthestars.org or the CDC Web site, www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/ActEarly/cerebral_palsy.html, for more information on CP.

Healthy Ideas

For information on cerebral palsy, call the National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities at (800) 695-0285 or see www.nichcy.org/. You can also go to www.reachingforthestars.org and the CDC Web site, www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/ActEarly/cerebral_palsy.html.

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