



Youth and Cerebral Palsy

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What is Cerebral Palsy?

Cerebral palsy is a brain abnormality that results from abnormal development or damage to the brain before, during, or shortly after birth. It is a multiple handicapping condition that includes problems with balance, speech, and overall motor function. It is not a degenerative disease and can even improve to an extent over time in some individuals.

What Are the Types of Cerebral Palsy?

There are four main types of cerebral palsy. These are:

1. **Spastic**—muscles are too tight, which causes stiff and jerky movement. This type is divided into five sub-categories:
 1. **Hemiplegia**—affects one side of body,
 2. **Quadriplegia**—affects all limbs,
 3. **Diplegia**—affects arms and legs,
 4. **Monoplegia**—affects one limb,
 5. **Triplegia**—affects three limbs,
2. **Ataxic**—muscles are too weak, causing unsteadiness, shakiness, and poor balance,
3. **Athetoid**—muscles are either too tight or too weak at varying times, causing involuntary movement in the face and arms,
4. **Mixed**—this is a combination of some or all of the three types listed above.

What Causes Cerebral Palsy?

Many things can cause cerebral palsy. Before or during birth, it can be caused by Rhesus (Rh) incompatibility, drug or alcohol use by the mother, kidney and urinary tract infections in the mother, infections in the mother such as rubella, cytomegalovirus, or toxoplasmosis, stroke of the fetus or newborn, bleeding on the newborn’s brain, untreated jaundice in the newborn, or a shortage of oxygen at birth for the newborn. After birth cerebral palsy can occur due to encephalitis, meningitis, or head injuries resulting from accidents or abuse.

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What are Some Difficulties Due to Cerebral Palsy?

Some problems associated with cerebral palsy are speech and language disabilities, the inability to control drooling, and incontinence. These problems stem from a person's difficulty in controlling the muscles that regulate these functions. Learning disabilities are present in some individuals with cerebral palsy, as is mild to severe delays in mental development. About half of the individuals with cerebral palsy experience seizures.

How is Cerebral Palsy Treated?

Individuals with cerebral palsy may have to undergo many forms of treatment. These include physical therapy, speech and language therapy, surgical procedures to inhibit muscle contractions, and pharmacological treatment to control seizures and spastic movements.

Important Issues for Extension Educators and 4-H Leaders to Consider:

1. Have contact information for parents or guardians and the member's doctor in an accessible place. An example of this would be behind the child's nametag and in the medical forms box in the main office at 4-H events. This form should include information such as what kinds of medications the child is taking, allergies, if any adaptive devices are used, and other health conditions.
2. It is a good idea to visit with the child and his or her family about the member's condition. Questions that could be asked include: "What type of cerebral palsy do you have?" and "What do I need to know to keep you safe if you are having a seizure?" It is best to be informed about each child's condition as no two cerebral palsy patients are the same.
3. Not every child with cerebral palsy will have delays in mental development. Many children with cerebral palsy have average or above average IQs.
4. Not every child with cerebral palsy is confined to a wheelchair.
5. Just because a child with cerebral palsy has a speech problem does not mean that the person has learning disabilities or delays in mental development. The child mostly likely has a problem with the muscles that are vital for normal speech.

For More Information Contact:

United Cerebral Palsy

1660 L St., NW, Suite 700

Washington, DC 20036-5603

Phone: (800) USA-5-UCP or (800) 872-5827

TTY: (202) 973-7197

Web site: <http://www.ucp.org>

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