

CEREBRAL PALSY

This fact sheet has been written by parent carers for parent carers



What is cerebral palsy?

Cerebral palsy is a general term used to describe a group of lifelong conditions affecting a person's movement, posture and co-ordination. It is caused by damage to the brain, before, during or shortly after birth. Around 1 in 400 children in the UK have cerebral palsy.

Characteristics of cerebral palsy

Cerebral palsy can affect people in a wide range of ways. Some people have very mild forms, whereas others have more severe forms of the condition. No two people are affected in exactly the same way. cerebral palsy can cause problems with sitting, standing and walking, with controlling or relaxing muscles, and with fine motor skills. Some people who have cerebral palsy may have other conditions such as epilepsy, scoliosis (curvature of the spine), hearing or visual impairments or learning difficulties. cerebral palsy is not a progressive condition, which means it does not get worse as your child gets older. But over time the physical challenges of the condition can cause wear and tear on the body.

Types of cerebral palsy

- **Spastic cerebral palsy** – the most common form. This is characterised by stiff muscles, which might be affected in different parts of the body. Hemiplegia affects one side; diplegia mainly affects the legs and quadriplegia affects the upper and lower body.
- **Athetoid or Dyskinetic cerebral palsy** – a less common form of the condition characterised by random and uncontrolled body movements or sudden involuntary spasms.
- **Ataxic cerebral palsy** – another rare form of the condition characterised by problems with balance, depth perception and fine motor skills
- **Mixed cerebral palsy** – type of the condition characterised by a mixture of the above types, most commonly stiff muscles and involuntary movements.

Types of therapy

There is no 'cure' for cerebral palsy but there are a number of therapies available that can improve movement, co-ordination and independence, including:

- **Bobath therapy** – intense form of physiotherapy which seeks to maximise a child's ability to move, sit and function as normally as possible
- **Conductive education** – a method of teaching children with motor difficulties like cerebral palsy how to maximise mobility and independence.
- **Medication** – a number of medicines can help children who are in pain or discomfort.
- **Occupational therapy (OT)** – can help your child gain independence and master everyday tasks such as eating and going to the toilet.
- **Orthopaedic surgery** – sometimes used to correct bones and joints. May involve lengthening muscles that are too short.
- **Physiotherapy** – a vital component of any therapy for cerebral palsy, it prevents muscles from contracting or weakening and promotes independence.
- **Selective Dorzal Rhizotomy (SDR)** – specialist surgery not suitable in all cases. Some nerve endings in the lower spinal column are cut to reduce muscle stiffness and aid mobility.
- **Speech and Language Therapy (SALT)** – can be useful in helping children speak or develop alternative means of communicating (for example, sign language).



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Ask about

- **Amaze** – the **Special Educational Needs and Disability Information, Advice and Support Service (SENDIASS)** offers impartial, confidential advice on anything to do with special educational needs and disabilities for 0 to 25 year olds. Parents, carers, children and young people under 25 with SEND living in Brighton & Hove or East Sussex can use the service. Email sendiass@amazesussex.org.uk, call **01273 772289** or visit our website at <https://amazesussex.org.uk>
- **Chailey Heritage Clinical Services** – a range of services and therapies available to children with complex physical or neurological physical disabilities. Call: **01825 722112**.
- **Dame Vera Lynn Children's Charity** – early intervention and support to under fives with cerebral palsy and other motor learning impairments. Tel: **01444 473274** or email: info@dvfcc.org.uk.
- **Disability Living Allowance (DLA)** – if your child's care or mobility needs are significantly greater than the needs of their peers you may be able to claim DLA for them. Visit www.gov.uk and search for DLA. Amaze can also give you advice and support with making a claim. Call our helpline: **01273 772289** or visit our website: amazesussex.org.uk.
- **Parent support groups** – there are many parent led groups for children with disabilities in Brighton & Hove. Some are for all children with SEND and some for children with specific disabilities. You can find a list of local groups in Brighton & Hove at: amazesussex.org.uk/parent-carers/info-advice-parent-carers/survival-strategies/parent-support-groups
- **Seaside View Child Development Centre** – this is where many children are diagnosed and where health professionals such as paediatricians and therapists work together to support and treat your child. Assessments will usually be via a health or education professional but you can contact Seaside View directly on: **01273 265780**.
- **Whoopsadaisy** – Brighton-based charity offering conductive education for children with cerebral palsy and other physical disabilities. Runs family groups for parent carers and under 5s and Saturday and holiday clubs for 5 to 12 year olds. call: **01273 554178**, email: info@whoopsadaisy.org or visit: www.whoopsadaisy.org.

Further reading and useful links

- **Cerebral Palsy information website** – go to: www.cerebralpalsy.org.uk.
- **Local Offer** – the local authority's online listing of all the services and support that are available to families with children with SEND in the area. Visit new.brighton-hove.gov.uk/special-educational-needs-and-disabilities
- **Scope** – www.scope.org.uk or call the helpline: **0808 800 3333**.

