



CEREBRAL PALSY

Cerebral Palsy (CP) is a non-progressive, but changing condition that affects about 1 out of every 500 individuals living in British Columbia. Cerebral Palsy is a term used to describe a group of disorders affecting body movement and muscle coordination.

Cerebral = "of the brain"
Palsy = "lack of muscle control"

Cerebral palsy is a group of disorders that hinders control of movement. It is caused by an injury to the brain during pregnancy, around the time of birth, or shortly after birth. This brain damage may be caused by several factors depending on the type, the onset, and the health history of mother and child. Cerebral palsy is either congenital (present at birth) or acquired after birth. This damage interferes with messages from the brain to the body, and from the body to the brain.

It is not a disease in the strict sense of the word and hence is not contagious or hereditary in nature. Although C.P. is a non-progressive condition ---that is the damage to the brain does not worsen with the passage of time, the effects of cerebral palsy may change. Body movement and muscle coordination may deteriorate with the aging process or in some cases the condition may actually improve.

People with Cerebral Palsy enjoy a full and active life to the extent that their bodies are able to accommodate. People with Cerebral Palsy enjoy satisfying careers, university education, social life, and become parents. There are many people with this condition in fields which include legal, accounting, music, art, administration, research, advocacy, entrepreneur, secretaries, web design, computer professionals, fundraising, education - to name a few.

Characteristics of Cerebral Palsy are:

- Lack of coordination
- Spasticity
- Muscle tightness or spasm
- Involuntary movement
- Different walking patterns
- Speech impairment
- Difficulty with gross & fine motor skills
- Abnormal perception & sensation

Different types of Cerebral Palsy

1. Spastic cerebral palsy is the most common form, affecting approximately 70 percent of cerebral palsy patients. This form is characterized by stiff and permanently contracted



muscles. This has a jerky, unpredictable effect on movement, causing difficulty in moving from position to position.

2. Ataxic cerebral palsy is much less common than spastic, affecting approximately 5 to 10 percent of cerebral palsy patients. The main effect of this type is on the child's sense of depth perception and balance. This is often accompanied by poor coordination, and children affected by ataxic cerebral palsy can display an abnormal gait when walking, as well as difficulty with precise movement. Another characteristic of ataxic cerebral palsy is the intention tremor. These tremors are initiated by a voluntary movement, such as reaching for a light switch, and become more severe as the individual gets closer to the objective.

3. Athetoid cerebral palsy affects about 10 to 20 percent of patients. The primary characteristic is slow, uncontrolled movement. In most cases, this affects the arms, legs, hands and feet, and in rare cases, the musculature of the face and tongue, which can cause drooling and grimacing. These effects often become more severe in stressful and/or emotional times, and can also disappear entirely during sleep. Patients also have problems coordinating the muscles that are used in speech, resulting in a condition known as dysarthria.

Technology and Adaptive Devices

An enormous range of aids and adaptive equipment are now available for people with disabilities. For example, an individual with Cerebral Palsy who is in a wheel chair may experience certain challenges in the work place, such as computer usage and work station accessibility. In this case devices such as head sticks and or key guards are all appropriate use. As the number of elderly people in Canada increases, more daily living aids are coming on to the market.

Rather than helping with the work itself, the devices are designed to help with joint and muscle protection, energy conservation and pain management. It is important to remember that limbs affected by Cerebral Palsy are not paralyzed and can feel pain, heat, cold and pressure.

Devices include:

Adaptive Equipment Mobility Devices

- Wheelchairs (manual, power and sports)
- Scooters
- Walkers and crutches

Communication Devices:

- Symbol Boards
- Voice Synthesizers
- Key guards for computers

Daily Living Aids:



- Large Buttoned Telephones
- Electronic Door Openers
- Environmental Control Systems

Accommodations for Individuals with Cerebral Palsy

Performing Activities of Daily Living:

- Provide an accessible restroom
- Assign work stations or offices close to an accessible restroom
- Allow the use of personal care attendants if necessary
- Allow the use of a service animal

Accommodations for Individuals with Cerebral Palsy

Accessing Offices and Workplace Environments:

- Provide accessible parking, an accessible route of travel, and accessible entrances/exits
- Install lightweight doors or automatic door openers
- Maintain unobstructed hallways, aisles, and means of egress
- Provide an accessible ergonomic desk or portable wheelchair desk
- Adjust desk height if wheelchair or scooter is used
- Ensure that work materials and equipment are within reach range
- Move work station close to other work areas, office equipment break rooms

Fine Motor Impairment:

- Implement ergonomic workstation design including arm supports, page turner, book holders etc
- Provide alternative computer and telephone access, writing and grip aids
- Use writing and grip aids

Communicating with Others:

- Provide use of communication aid with speech output
- Add communication software/speech synthesizer to a laptop computer
- Use a speech clarification device

Fatigue and Weakness:

- Reduce or eliminate physical exertion and workplace stress
- Schedule periodic rest breaks away from the workstation
- Allow a flexible work schedule and flexible use of leave time

Stress Management:

- Develop strategies to deal with work problems before they arise
- Provide sensitivity training to coworkers



- Allow telephone calls during work hours to doctors and other for support
- Provide information on counseling and employee assistance programs

This information has been compiled by Open Door Group to help support employers hire persons with disabilities. For more information contact us:

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