Cerebral Palsy

Cerebral Palsy (CP) is a term used to describe a group of disorders affecting body movement and muscle co-ordination. CP is a non-progressive disability in which children have difficulty with motor control of certain groups of muscles. Development of the brain starts in early pregnancy and continues until about age three. Damage to the brain during this time may result in CP. The disabling effects of CP range from very slight impairments of motor control to near-total impairment of voluntary movement.

Possible signs of CP at birth. The baby:
- has poor sucking reflex at birth
- experiences seizures within the first 24-48 hours of life
- requires resuscitation at birth or shortly afterwards
- skin is blue or dusky coloured at birth
- has difficulty maintaining his/her body temperature

CP is the result of a cerebral defect or injury to the area of the brain which controls movement. Such an injury may occur before, during or after birth. The damage interferes with messages from the brain to the body, and from the body to the brain. The effects of CP vary widely from individual to individual. At its mildest, CP may result in a slight awkwardness of movement or hand control. At its most severe, CP may result in virtually no muscle control, profoundly affecting movement and speech. CP may also involve intellectual, sensory, behavioural and perceptual problems frequently found in combination with each other. It is important to remember that people with CP, no matter how severe the degree of physical disability, do not necessarily have intellectual or cognitive impairments. Depending on which areas of the brain have been damaged, one or more of the following may occur:
- muscle tightness or spasms
- involuntary movement
- difficulty with "gross motor skills" such as walking or running
- difficulty with "fine motor skills" such as writing or doing up buttons
- difficulty in perception and sensation

These effects may cause associated problems such as difficulties in feeding, poor bladder and bowel control, breathing problems, and pressure sores. The brain damage which caused CP may also lead to other conditions such as seizures, learning disabilities or developmental delay.

CP is not a progressive condition and damage to the brain is a one-time event so it will not get worse. Although the condition is not progressive, the effects of CP may change over time. Some may improve—for example, a child whose hands are affected may be able to gain enough hand control to write and to dress him/herself. Others may get worse—tight muscles can cause problems in the hips and spine of growing children which require orthopaedic surgery; the aging process can be harder on bodies with abnormal posture or which have had little exercise. People with CP have a normal life-span.

CP is NOT contagious, hereditary or life-threatening. Limbs affected by CP are not paralysed and can feel pain, heat, cold and pressure. The degree of physical disability experienced by a person with CP is not an indication of his/her level of intelligence.

Resources

Cerebral Palsy Help and Hope - www.cerebralpalsyhelp.com
Ontario Federation of Cerebral Palsy - www.ofcp.ca
United Cerebral Palsy - www.ucp.org

Documents and Articles

Multiple Births Canada Fact Sheets on various topics related to multiple pregnancy, births and parenting, as well as feeding multiples http://multiplebirthscanada.org/index.php/education/publications/fact-sheets

Compiled by Lynda P. Haddon, Multiple Birth Educator, www.multiplebirthsfamilies.com
Reviewed by Francesca Bell

Recommended Sources of Information:

Multiple Births Canada
www.multiplebirthscanada.org
Toll-Free (in Canada): 1-866-228-8824
Telephone: 613-834-TWIN(8946)
Email: office@multiplebirthscanada.org

Multiple Births Canada / Naissances Multiples Canada is a Registered Charity.
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