

Cerebral palsy and communication

Cerebral palsy is when you have trouble controlling body movements.

It happens if there is damage to your brain. This damage occurs early in life – before, during or soon after birth.

It affects different people in different ways. Some people are only mildly affected. Others can be more severely affected.

Cerebral palsy cannot be cured. However, people with cerebral palsy can learn new skills and movements.

Types of cerebral palsy

There are different types of cerebral palsy:

- spastic – increased muscle tone resulting in tightness or stiffness
- hypotonic – low muscle tone resulting in weakness
- dyskinetic – involuntary, uncontrollable, irregular movements
- dystonia – constant muscle movement, resulting in twisting or repetitive movement
- athetosis – continuous, slow involuntary circling movement
- chorea – unpredictable, fast involuntary movement
- ataxia – unsteady ‘shaky’ movements or tremor.
- Cerebral palsy can affect different parts of your body:
 - hemiplegia – one side of your body, involving the arm and leg on the same side
 - diplegia – both legs are mainly affected, but it can mildly involve your arms and hands
 - quadriplegia – both arms and legs are affected. Muscles of your trunk, neck and face can also be affected.

People with cerebral palsy may have other conditions as well. This includes epilepsy (seizures), dysphagia (trouble swallowing), sensory processing challenges, trouble seeing or hearing, learning challenges and complex communication needs.

How cerebral palsy affects communication

Having cerebral palsy can make it hard to communicate. To speak, you need to control different muscles, from your face to your trunk.

If you have cerebral palsy, it might be hard to control these muscles.

Some people with cerebral palsy might have **dysarthria**. This is when your voice isn't clear. It can happen when cerebral palsy affects the muscles you use for breathing and speaking.

Other people might have apraxia of speech. This is when you have trouble planning the movements you need to speak.

People with cerebral palsy who cannot use speech often use augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) strategies.

Cerebral palsy and AAC

AAC includes using things like:

- informal communication methods, such as pointing, looking, vocalising, facial expressions, and body language
- key word sign and gesture
- aided language strategies, like paper-based systems or electronic speech-generating devices.
- You can use AAC in different ways, such as with:
 - a direct point with finger or hand
 - eye gaze
 - partner-assisted scanning

You might need to be taught specific movements to use AAC.

Physiotherapists and occupational therapists can help with this.

How speech pathologists can help people with cerebral palsy

Speech pathologists will work with you and your family to:

- help you with speech, communication and managing dysphagia
- help you eat and drink safely
- help you speak more clearly
- help you with AAC strategies, including using electronic devices
- work with your family and carers to help you communicate.

Find out more

For more information contact:

- <https://www.mycpguide.org.au/>
- www.cpec.org.au
- <https://cerebralpalsy.org.au/>
- <https://cpsn.org.au/>
- <https://canchild.ca/en/diagnoses/cerebral-palsy>