

51 Tips for Coping with Cerebral Palsy

Cerebral palsy affects approximately 800,000 children adults in the United States. This ebook will help give you information, resources and tips for helping to live with this debilitating condition.



BASICS

This first set of tips will go over some of the basics of cerebral palsy.

1. Definition

Cerebral palsy is a chronic condition that affects body movements and muscle coordination. It is caused by damage to one or more specific areas of the brain, usually occurring during fetal development, or during infancy.

2. History

Cerebral palsy was considered a distinct condition in 1861. Dr. William John Little, published the first paper describing the neurological problems of children with spastic diplegia (also known as cerebral palsy). This is still sometimes called Little's Disease.

3. Statistics

Two children out of every thousand born in America have cerebral palsy. At least 5000 infants and toddlers and about 1,400 preschoolers are diagnosed with cerebral palsy each year.



TYPES OF CEREBRAL PALSY

There are 4 types of cerebral palsy. This next set of tips will discuss these types, and their differences.

4. Spastic

Spastic cerebral palsy is characterized by stiff or permanently contracted muscles. 70-80 percent of people with CP have this type.

5. Athetoid

Athetoid cerebral palsy is characterized by uncontrolled, slow movements. 10-20 percent of people have this type of CP.

6. Ataxic

Ataxic CP is characterized by a lack of coordination and balance. This type of CP accounts for 10 percent of all cases of CP. Ataxic CP (or any kind of CP) is *not* degenerative.

7. Mixed

Mixed CP is when one person has two or more types of CP. The most common type of mixed CP is Athetoid/Spastic-diplegic or Athetoid/Spastic-hemiplegic.



DIAGNOSIS

This next set of tips will discuss how cerebral palsy is diagnosed.

8. Symptoms

Diagnosing children with CP at a young age is important. Here are some of the symptoms to look for in a newborn child:

- Lack of alertness
- Abnormal cry
- Trembling arms and legs
- Problems sucking and swallowing
- Weak muscle tone
- Favoring one side of the body
- Abnormal reflexes
- Seizures

9. Muscle Tone

Abnormal muscle tone is very common in people with cerebral palsy. Even as newborns, their muscles may change from low tone to high tone. They can also go from floppy to very stiff.

10. Developmental Delays

If you're concerned that your child may have cerebral palsy, look for developmental delays such as:

- Rolling over
- Sitting up
- Crawling
- Talking
- Walking

11. Time

Understand that it takes time to diagnose cerebral palsy, especially specifying the type of CP. If it's for a child, his doctor will want to take time to do tests and examine him several times before making the diagnosis.



RISK FACTORS

There are several factors that put you at risk of having a child with cerebral palsy. This next set of tips will explain a few of these risks.

12. Age and Race

According to research, the following people have a higher chance of having a child with CP:

- A mother *or* a father under 20 years old
- A mother over 40 years old
- African-American ethnicity

13. Blood Type

There is a rare circumstance where the mom's and child's blood is incompatible. This is called Rh or ABO blood type incompatibility, and it puts you at risk of having a child with cerebral palsy.

14. Micro-Organisms

In rare cases, your infant's central nervous system can be attacked by micro-organisms. This will put him at high risk of developing cerebral palsy.

15. Doctor Error

Unfortunately, there are some cases of cerebral palsy where the doctor was at fault. There are now a ton of lawyers that are dedicated to bringing these doctors to justice. If you think a doctor was at fault for your child's CP, you can contact www.cerebralpalsy.ws to talk to an attorney.

16. Other Factors

Here are some of the other risk factors associated with CP:

- Bleeding in the brain
- Infection
- Lack of oxygen



CAUSES

This next set of tips will talk about some of the causes of cerebral palsy.

17. Pregnancy

There are a number of things that can happen during pregnancy that can cause your baby to have CP. Some of these include you getting sick, getting in an accident, or developing an infection.

18. Lack of Oxygen

Lack of oxygen at birth is a common cause of cerebral palsy in children. An adult could also develop CP if he for some reason is deprived of oxygen.

19. Trauma

Any trauma in a child or an adult can cause cerebral palsy. These can include:

- Car accident
- Head Injury
- Stroke

20. Infection

Brain infection can cause CP. These infections include:

- Meningitis
- Viral encephalitis



TREATMENTS

There are several ways to treat cerebral palsy, along with ways to make coping easier. This next set of tips will discuss some of these treatments.

21. Exercise

Exercise can be a great benefit for people with cerebral palsy. These exercises need to be tailored for each person, as everyone has their limitations. Ask your doctor or therapist for his advice before starting any exercise program.

22. Chiropractic

Some people with CP have found great success with chiropractors. Make sure you research and find a chiropractor that has experience with cerebral palsy.

23. Electrical Stimulation

Another thing that helps people with cerebral palsy is Therapeutic Electrical Stimulation (TES). This is done at night while the patient sleeps. TES has been proven to add more muscle fiber, and along with exercise and therapy, it helps the patient have better use of his muscles.

24. Swimming

Swimming has helped lots of people with CP. Warm water especially helps stiff muscles to relax. Performing swimming motions also increases muscle tone and strength.

25. Feldenkrais

The Feldenkrais method for cerebral palsy designed to retrain the body and mind. This method uses a combination of physical therapy, psychology, and martial arts to retrain the mind, and develop movement and physical growth.

26. Adaptive Equipment

Special equipment is also available for children with cerebral palsy. Some of these include:

- Wheelchair
- Walker
- Leg braces
- Special Utensils
- Communication aides



THERAPIES

Therapy has done a lot for people (especially children) with cerebral palsy. This next set of tips will discuss some of these therapies.

27. Physical

Physical therapy helps a child with CP develop stronger muscles in their legs and trunk. During physical therapy, your child works on things like walking, sitting, and keeping his or her balance.

28. Occupational

Occupational therapy helps a person with CP develop fine motor skills, in order to function in everyday life. These skills can be things like dressing, feeding, writing, and other daily living tasks.

29. Speech

People with cerebral palsy often have speech delays. Many times talking is difficult because of problems with muscle tone in the tongue and throat. Speech therapy helps develop communication skills, especially speaking.

30. Sensory Integration

Sensory Integration Therapy (SIT) helps to overcome problems young children with CP have in absorbing and processing sensory information. SIT Therapies include stimulating touch sensations and pressures on different parts of the body, thus motivating children to learn sequences of movements.

31. HBOT

Hyperbaric Oxygen Therapy (HBOT) treatments have seen some great success in people with cerebral palsy. During HBOT, the patient enters a tank, and the patient breathes 100% oxygen under pressure (normal outside air usually only contains about 20% oxygen). This type of therapy infuses oxygen into the blood and organs, thus a regenerates and enhances certain tissues, organs, and bone structures.

32. Hippotherapy

Hippotherapy is therapy treatment that uses horseback riding to provide activities that can significantly improve muscle tone, posture, balance, and walking abilities. The horse's movement gives a sense of rhythm to the rider as well as forces the rider to move with the horse.

33. Craniosacral

Craniosacral Therapy (CST) is a treatment involving massage and the brain and spinal cord. A trained craniosacral therapist can detect abnormalities, and by applying pressures to certain parts of the body, it can be very healing.

34. Dolphin

Dolphin therapy has been around for more than 25 years. Research shows that dolphins are able to recognize the child's deficiency, thus allowing them to connect to the child. This results in healing that can lead to developmental progress.

35. Space Suit

Space suit therapy is another therapy for children and adults with cerebral palsy. It provides the following benefits:

- Supports weak muscles
- Improves muscle tone
- Improves balance
- Improves gross motor skills



MEDICATIONS

There are several medications that help with cerebral palsy. This next set of tips will go over some of these medications.

36. Muscle Relaxants

Muscle relaxants have seen much success in patients with cerebral palsy. Some of these include:

- Diazepam (Valium)
- Baclofen
- Dantrolene

37. Anticonvulsants

Anticonvulsant medications help with seizures, which are very common in CP patients. Examples of anticonvulsants include:

- Lamictal
- Topomax
- Zonegran
- Trileptal
- Neurontin

38. Anticholinergics

Anticholinergics help some of people with CP who have more severe uncontrollable body movements, or who drool frequently. These medications include:

- Cogentin
- Robinul
- Kemadrin

39. Dopaminergic

Dopaminergic drugs affect motor function in the hands, feet, and other parts of the body. Here are a couple of examples:

- Artane
- Sinemet



SURGERIES

In some cases, a person may require surgery. This next set of tips will explain some of these surgeries.

40. SDR

One of the treatments for cerebral palsy is Selective Dorsal Rhizotomy (SDR). SDR provided permanent reduction of spasticity in cerebral palsy. The operation consists of cutting the dorsal roots in the spine. This results in reducing spasticity.

41. Tenotomy

Tenotomy is a procedure of cutting an affected tendon or muscle. Tenotomy is used to treat spasticity in cerebral palsy patients. This surgery helps in serious cases of cerebral palsy where the possibility of further damage is a big possibility.

42. Botox

Botox A injections are types of surgeries given to cerebral palsy patients. These injections can be effective in calming overactive muscles. These injections especially help with muscles in the upper body, arms, legs, and “tiptoe walking,” which is common with and leg spasticity.

43. Heel Cord

A lot of times, children with cerebral palsy walk on their toes. This is because of tight heel cords. Surgery can help correct it by lengthening the tendon. It can also help the patient to better learn to walk, and to improve balance.



TIPS FOR PARENTS

This last set of tips will go over some things that parents of children with CP can do to give you both a better quality of life.

44. Research

Do your research. New treatments are being discovered every day to help children with cerebral palsy. Use the internet to keep yourself abreast of new options that become available.

45. Have Fun

Have fun with your child. Do all the things you would do with a non-disabled child. It's important that he has all the childhood experiences that he can.

46. Hope

Always have hope. Don't let you or your child get discouraged. When new problems arise, try and deal with them head on.

47. Ask for Help

Don't be afraid to ask for help. Taking care of a child with a disability can be very challenging and sometimes draining. Reach out to family, friends, and neighbors for help and respite.

48. Learn to Adapt

Help your child learn to adapt to his disability. Get creative, and help him to be as independent as he can. This will boost his self esteem, and make him try even harder.

49. Don't Push

It's important not to push your child. Let him go at his own pace, which will probably vary as he grows. It's also important to let him know you support him, no matter what.

50. Don't Make CP Your Life

While research, doctor visits, therapy are all important, don't let CP *define* you or your child's life. Have "normal" days where you just let him be a kid.

51. Set Goals

Though you shouldn't push your child, it *is* important to set goals. When he's old enough, sit down with him and set some very reachable goals. Then be sure to celebrate *every* achievement with him.