CPNI
Cyprus Paediatric Neurology Institute
Παιδονευρολογικό Ινστιτούτο Κύπρου

LEAFLET FOR PARENTS AND PATIENTS

# Cerebral palsy: information for families

Cerebral palsy (CP) is a group of conditions that affect movement, posture and muscle tone. It is caused by an injury to, or a difference in, the developing brain before, during or soon after birth. It is the most common physical disability in childhood. The brain injury does not get worse, but its effects on the body can change as a child grows, so regular review and therapy are important.

## What causes cerebral palsy?

Often there is more than one factor, and sometimes no cause is found. Known causes include:

- Being born very early (prematurity) or with a very low birth weight
- Lack of oxygen to the brain around the time of birth
- Infection during pregnancy, or meningitis in early life
- Bleeding in the brain or a stroke around the time of birth
- Differences in how the brain developed, sometimes with a genetic cause

## Types of cerebral palsy

- Spastic CP, the most common type: muscles are stiff and tight
- Dyskinetic CP: movements are involuntary, twisting or jerky
- Ataxic CP: balance and coordination are affected
- Mixed CP: features of more than one type
- CP may affect one side of the body (hemiplegia), mainly the legs (diplegia), or the whole body (quadriplegia)

## Early signs

- Delay in sitting, crawling or walking
- Muscles that feel unusually stiff or floppy
- Strongly preferring one hand before the age of 12 months
- Feeding or swallowing difficulties
- Unusual postures or ways of moving

## Other health needs we look out for

Children with CP may also have other needs. We check for these at reviews:

- Epilepsy
- Learning difficulties, and speech and communication difficulties
- Visual difficulties, including squint and problems with how the brain processes vision, and hearing problems
- Feeding, swallowing, nutrition, drooling and constipation
- Sleep problems and pain
- Emotional and behavioural difficulties, and problems with attention and concentration
- Hip problems: children with CP need regular hip X-rays (hip surveillance), as the hip can gradually move out of its socket

## Treatment and therapy

There is no cure for CP, but a lot can be done to help children move, communicate and take part in daily life. Care is shared by a team working with your family:

- Physiotherapy, to improve movement, strength, balance and walking
- Occupational therapy, to help with hand use and everyday skills, including constraint-induced movement therapy (CIMT) for children with weakness on one side of the body
- Speech and language therapy, for communication and for feeding and swallowing difficulties
- Splints (orthoses), standing frames, seating and other equipment
- Medicines to reduce stiffness or involuntary movements
- Botulinum toxin injections (see below)
- Orthopaedic surgery for some children, for example for tight tendons or the hips

## Botulinum toxin (Botox) injections at CPNI

CPNI offers a specialist botulinum toxin injection service. Injections into chosen muscles relax stiffness (spasticity) for about 4 to 6 months. This gives a window in which physiotherapy, stretching, splints or casting work better, to improve movement, comfort, care and walking. We assess each child carefully, agree goals with you and your child's therapists, and review the effect after each treatment.

## How you can help

- ✓ Keep up the stretches and exercises your therapists recommend, built into play and daily routines
- ✓ Encourage your child to do as much as possible for themselves
- ✓ Work with the school so your child gets the right support and equipment
- ✓ Bring a short list of questions or changes you have noticed to each appointment
- ✓ Look after yourself too: support groups and other families can help, such as Agalia Elpidas, the Cyprus organisation of parents of children with cerebral palsy (www.agaliaelpidas.org)

## When to get help

**Call 112 straight away if your child has a seizure lasting more than 5 minutes, has difficulty breathing, or is choking. Please contact us or your doctor soon if you notice:**

- New or increasing pain, including hip pain
- Your child losing skills they had before
- More or different seizures
- Feeding difficulties, coughing with meals, frequent chest infections or weight loss
- Muscles becoming much stiffer, or splints no longer fitting

## Notes for your next appointment

Use this table to write down changes and questions, and bring it to your child's review.

| Date | What I noticed | Questions to ask |
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## Contact CPNI

To book a review or to ask about our botulinum toxin service, please call our office on +357 22 476 627 or email cpni2007@gmail.com.

**More leaflets and information: www.cpni.com.cy**

This leaflet gives general information. It does not replace advice from your child's doctor.

Reviewed by Dr Paola Nicolaides, Consultant Paediatric Neurologist, November 2026.

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