

# Let's Talk About...

## Cerebral palsy

If the brain does not develop normally—before, during, or immediately after birth, there can be changes in brain tissue. These changes can result in cerebral palsy (CP), a condition that causes problems with movement. These problems may come from weakness, poor muscle coordination, spasticity (spaz-TISS-it-tee), or muscle stiffness.

### What causes cerebral palsy?

The cause of cerebral palsy is not known in about half of the cases. Several factors may be associated with the condition:

- Premature birth
- Low birth weight
- Infections while in the womb
- Strokes while in the womb
- Lack of oxygen
- Abnormal fetus development



### What are the symptoms of cerebral palsy?

Children who have cerebral palsy may:

- Walk on their toes
- Be unable to walk, talk, or eat
- Have difficulty learning
- Poor vision and hearing
- Difficulty swallowing
- Seizures
- Bowel and bladder problems
- Behavioral difficulties

### How is cerebral palsy diagnosed?

Your child's healthcare provider will ask about your child's medical history. They will ask if your child was premature, if there were any difficulties with delivery, and if you think they are developing normally. The healthcare provider will check your child's movement patterns and reflexes. They may order an MRI, a machine that can take electronic pictures of the brain. The healthcare provider may also order other lab tests or genetic tests that will help diagnose cerebral palsy.

### How is cerebral palsy managed?

Each child is different, and your child will have a special treatment plan to meet their individual needs. Talk to your child's doctors and therapists if you have concerns about any part of their treatment. Cerebral palsy is complicated, and the best treatment is not always clear. You know your child best and can help their care providers understand the problems they are facing. You can help decide which treatments are best for your child.

### How is my child's motor impairment treated?

Your child will probably have physical and occupational therapy. They may need splinting and casting. At home, your child will have strengthening and stretching programs. They will be encouraged to exercise.

