

C) Cerebral Palsy

Cerebral Palsy (CP) is used to describe a medical condition that affects control of the muscles. Cerebral means anything in the head and palsy refers to anything wrong with control of the muscles or joints in the body and therefore CP covers a spectrum of symptoms which vary in severity. An individual with cerebral palsy may have difficulty with fine motor tasks, such as writing, maintaining balance and walking, or be affected by involuntary movements, such as uncontrollable motions of the hands. The symptoms differ from one person to the next, and may even change over time in the individual. Some cerebral palsy sufferers are also affected by other medical disorders, including seizures or mental impairment. There are a number of identifiable types of CP:

■ Spastic Cerebral Palsy:

Children with spastic CP have stiff and jerky movements caused by muscles which are too tight (high muscle tone). This causes particular difficulties when moving from one bodily position to another or letting go of an object held in their hand. Spastic Cerebral Palsy is the most common type of CP. This form of cerebral palsy affects 70 to 80 percent of children who suffer from CP.

■ Ataxic Cerebral Palsy:

Distinguished by poor coordination and loose muscle tone (low muscle tone), children with this particular form of the condition look very unsteady and shaky. They experience extreme shakiness the majority of the time but this can become more pronounced when trying to perform fine movements such as turning the page of a book. Poor balance is also a problem for these children and they may be very unsteady when they walk. The ataxic form affects an estimated 5 to 10 percent of children who have CP.

■ Athetoid or Dyskinetic Cerebral Palsy:

This is a mixture of muscle tone which is too tight or loose. Here the child has trouble holding themselves in an upright, steady position for sitting or walking, and often show lots of movements of their face, arms and upper body which is not intentional. Athetoid cerebral palsy affects about 10 to 20 percent of children with CP.

■ Mixed Cerebral Palsy:

When muscle tone is too low in some muscles and too high in other muscles, the type of cerebral palsy is called mixed.

Differential Diagnosis:

Some disorders have similar symptoms. The clinician, therefore, in his diagnostic attempt, has to differentiate against the following disorders which need to be ruled out to establish a precise diagnosis :

Mental Retardation