

# PAIN IN CEREBRAL PALSY

Constant or recurring pain is a very common physical concern of individuals with cerebral palsy (CP), often beginning in childhood but becoming more intense and frequent over the lifespan. Here are some facts about pain in CP and measures that can be taken to alleviate this chronic problem.

## What causes pain in CP?

- The most frequent cause of chronic pain in people with CP is the absence of a correct clinical diagnosis.
- Common sources of pain, such as migraine headaches, constipation, or gynecological disorders, can be erroneously attributed to CP, disregarded, tolerated, or allowed to persist without proper evaluation and treatment.
- Uncommon conditions causing pain, such as autoimmune disorders, tumors, or infections (e.g. Lyme Disease) may not be considered in people with CP.
- Intense or prolonged muscle contractions, as occur in the spastic form of CP, can be painful, just as with a short-lived muscle spasm (charley horse).
- The excessive, repetitive, and atypical strain that spastic, stiff, or dystonic muscles place on joints leads to joint surface wear with resultant inflammation (arthritis) and exposed pain fibers.
- No specific source of pain may be evident, but the pain nerves themselves are dysfunctional (this is called neuropathic pain).

## How can pain in CP be treated?

### STEP 1

Ongoing care by a primary care doctor (pediatrician, family physician, internist, and/or gynecologist) who can evaluate and manage common causes of pain and promote optimal general health, nutrition, and fitness.

### STEP 2

Evaluation by a CP specialist, such as a developmental pediatrician, neurologist, or physical medicine and rehabilitation specialist, who can determine whether pain is likely related to the CP or has another unrelated cause. A referral may be made for investigation of uncommon conditions.

### STEP 3

Musculoskeletal evaluation by a CP expert team in orthopedics, physical medicine and rehabilitation, and physical therapy. This team will determine what musculoskeletal pain preventive or treatment approaches are most effective.

# How can you find health care providers familiar with CP?



*American Academy for Cerebral Palsy and  
Developmental Medicine (AACPDM)*  
**(414) 918-3014**  
**[www.aacpdm.org](http://www.aacpdm.org)**

**Ask your primary care provider for a  
referral to a CP health professional expert  
or a clinic specializing in CP care.**

**Contact your closest academic health  
care center where CP specialists may be  
available.**



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