

HEALTH MANAGEMENT INSIGHTS

Cerebral palsy

Cerebral palsy (CP) is a group of disorders which affect movement and muscle tone or posture. They are caused by damage which occurs to the immature, developing brain, most often before birth.

People living with CP can have healthy, active lives. Many have a life expectancy equal to that of a person without the condition.

However, it can present challenging circumstances, which require accommodations and management.

The exact cause of CP is not clear in all cases, however known causes include:

- > Bleeding in the baby's brain, or reduced blood and oxygen supply to their brain
- > An infection caught by the mother during pregnancy
- > Meningitis
- > The brain temporarily not getting enough oxygen (asphyxiation) during a difficult birth
- > Serious head injury

Key takeaways

- > Cerebral palsy is a condition which affects muscle control and movement
- > It affects around 1-in-400 children in the UK
- > CP is the most-common motor disability in childhood
- > No matter the cause, symptoms show up in the first years of a child's life
- > CP is a non-progressive disorder, meaning it will not get worse as time goes on, but it can cause new challenges and issues as a person ages
- > You cannot develop the condition as an adult
- > The life expectancy of an individual with CP is comparable to that of the general population
- > Meaningful employment is possible for many people with CP
- > Some people with severe symptoms are unable to live independently, while others with milder symptoms can find and maintain employment
- > CP can fall within the scope of the Equality Act 2010, and workplace adjustments may be necessary to accommodate employees with the condition
- > Symptoms of CP may present some extra obstacles along with life's normal hurdles — but these can be supported and managed through therapy, surgery, medications and other measures

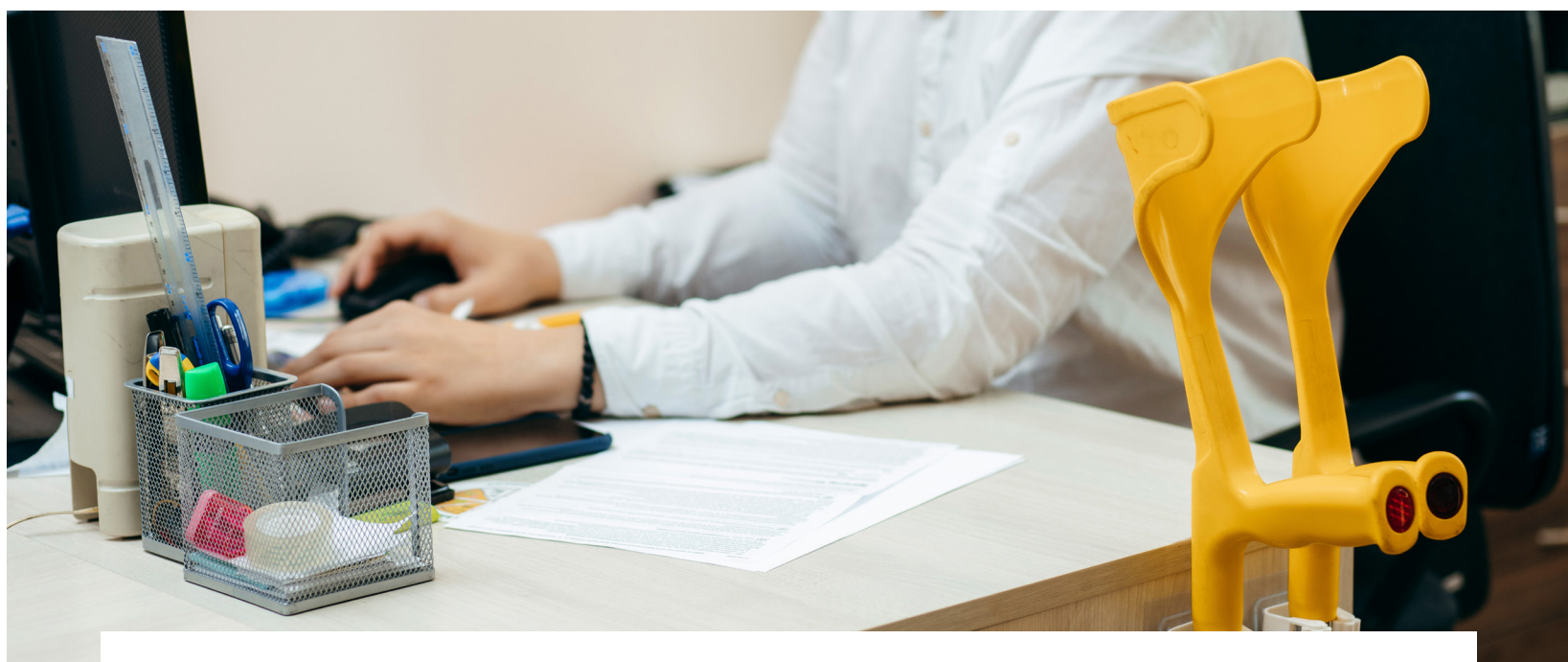
Symptoms

Signs and symptoms of cerebral palsy can vary greatly from person to person. It can affect the whole body, or might be limited primarily to one or two limbs, or to one side of the body.

Generally, people with CP might experience problems with movement and coordination, speech, eating and development, among other issues.

Symptoms can include:

- > Muscle spasms
- > Muscle weakness
- > Stiff muscles
- > Weak arms or legs
- > Scissor-like movements with legs when walking
- > Paralysis
- > Involuntary movements of limbs and hands
- > Twitching of the face and tongue
- > Difficulty swallowing
- > Loss of muscle tone
- > Shaking hands (tremors)
- > Poor balance



Treatment and recovery

There is currently no cure for cerebral palsy, however treatments are available to help people with the condition be as active and independent as possible throughout their lives.

This will usually involve support from a team of health care professionals, to agree a care plan, along with:

- > Physiotherapy to encourage movement, increase strength and stop muscles becoming weak
- > Occupational therapy to advise adults with CP on independent living - including on housing, getting a job, benefits and technology to assist with everyday tasks
- > Measures to help to manage symptoms, for example, medication to help with muscle spasms
- > Surgery to help with movement difficulties or other problems



Cerebral palsy and work

CP can make certain tasks more difficult, but many people are able to attend work full-time with great success and achievement.

The type and severity of potential limitations differ between individuals, and most people with the condition will require some accommodations to perform their duties in the workplace.

It is essential to consider your employee's specific limitations and create adjustments suited to their needs. As they have lived with the condition all their lives, they will already have an excellent idea of what adjustments will work best.

These may include:

- Making changes to the person's working pattern
- Accessible lifts for employees with walking aids or wheelchairs
- Training or mentoring
- Ensuring walkways are kept clear
- Making alterations to premises
- Ensuring that information is provided in accessible formats
- Modifying or acquiring equipment
- More time for meetings, if someone takes longer to communicate
- Weight of laptops and related equipment may need to be considered if they travel for work, possibly providing a trolley bag rather than a backpack
- Allowing extra time for specific tasks
- If an employee's cerebral palsy is affecting their mobility, balance, vision or hearing, a Personal Emergency Evacuation Plan (PEEP) should be put in place.

Advice from occupational health professionals can help employers to support employees, while still meeting business needs.

It may be possible to obtain help from the UK Government's Access to Work fund, which can contribute towards the cost of special aids, adaptations, equipment and more.

Health Adjustment Passport

The Health Adjustment Passport is a document completed by individuals with a disability or health condition, to help them identify what extra support they need in the workplace.



This could include:

- > Help communicating at interview
- > Help with travel to work or travelling in work time
- > Workplace assessments
- > Specialist IT software
- > Specialist equipment
- > A support worker

The passport can help with a smooth transition into employment and when changing job roles.

Contact us to find out more



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healthmanagement.co.uk



Useful resources

[NHS: Cerebral palsy](#)

[Gov UK: Access to Work](#)

[Gov UK: Health Adjustment Passport](#)

[Scope: Cerebral palsy](#)

[Business Disability Forum: Cerebral palsy](#)