

CEREBRAL PALSY – DYSKINESIS

Overview

The dyskinetic form of cerebral palsy affects a person's ability to control their movements. This involuntary movement tends to become more pronounced when the person becomes tired or emotional, which means it can then be harder to understand their responses. Depending on the type of involuntary movement experiences, dyskinesia can be further labelled as either dystonia or athetosis. The difference between the two is mainly in the muscle tension and in the way the person moves.

Effects on the body

Dystonia

Rigid muscle tension (hypertonia), lesser abnormal motion (hypokinesia) and twisting, repetitive movements are associated with dystonia. A person with dystonia may have awkward postures along with abnormally rapid or slow movements. Dystonia may occur all over the body or in just one particular area. For a specific area, focal dystonia will affect just that part, such as one leg or hand. This is the most common form of dystonia. When one side of the body is affected (one arm and one leg) then this is referred to hemidystonia. Generalised dystonia afflicts more than half of the body. It could be both legs and at least one arm, or the upper body along with a limb. This type of dystonia can also make it difficult to speak or swallow.

Athetosis

Low muscle tension and looser, floppy muscles (hypotonia) are apparent with athetosis, along with extreme variable movement (hyperkinesia). A person with athetosis will demonstrate involuntary movements which are random or jerky, often referred to as 'stormy'. They can seem as if they are restless and always moving. Main areas affected by athetosis are the arms and legs. A person with athetosis often struggles to hold their body upright or steady due to the muscles alternating between contracting and being floppy. Sometimes athetosis can affect the face and tongue muscles and appear as grimacing, drooling and speech difficulty (dysarthria) in varying degrees. The person may also find it difficult to hold a pen or utensil.

