

CEREBRAL PALSY – SPASTICITY

Overview

This is the most common form of cerebral palsy and is characterised by stiffness in the muscles. Movement appears jerky due to increased muscle tone, also known as hypertonia. Consequently groups of muscles in the body can be hard to control. The extent of the spasticity depends on the person and it can vary significantly between individuals.

Effects on the body

Arms

Flexion (or bending) at the elbow, wrist or fingers (clenched). When these areas are affected it can be difficult for the person to dress or feed themselves, or to pick up and use objects. It may even go so far as to make it hard to walk or stand properly due to diminished balance.

Legs

Flexion at the hip will cause the leg to lift upwards. The legs may also 'pull together' resulting in 'scissoring' of the thighs (adduction). If it is at the knee, then the person has difficulty straightening their legs and may have a crouched posture. Rigid calf muscles can manifest as toes pointing down and inwards and the heel being raised. This is referred to as equinovarus foot. Another scenario is when the big toe is pulled up and backwards (hyperextension). When a person's legs are affected by spasticity, then walking can prove difficult, along with sitting upright and general movement.

Speech

If the muscle groups in the face are affected, then speech can be compromised. Depending on the severity of the spasticity, the way a person talks may be somewhat slurred or they may even be totally unable to communicate using speech.

