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Cerebral Palsy

You may face some extra challenges if your child is deaf and has cerebral palsy. But there are things you can do.

Children with cerebral palsy are more likely than other children to have problems with their hearing. Try to find out if your child has a hearing loss as early as possible. That way, you can help your child get the help he needs right away.

What is cerebral palsy?

Cerebral palsy (seh-reh-bral PAHL-zee) is a medical problem where children may have a harder time moving smoothly, keeping their balance, and standing or sitting straight. Sometimes they may need a wheelchair or crutches to help them get around.

Children with cerebral palsy are all very different. But they all have some damage to their brains. The part of the brain that is hurt is the part that controls whether the muscles are tight or relaxed. This is called **muscle tone**. Children with cerebral palsy can have muscles that are too tight (called **high tone**) or too relaxed (called **low tone**.)

Cerebral palsy usually happens while the baby is growing in the mother's belly or while the baby is being born. Sometimes it can happen from a head injury soon after the baby is born. Cerebral palsy is not a disease that one person can give to another person, like a cold or the flu.

Cerebral palsy often comes with other problems:

- Problems with seeing, hearing or talking
- [Learning disabilities](http://www.raisingdeafkids.org/special/ld/) (<http://www.raisingdeafkids.org/special/ld/>)
- Problems with eating and breathing
- Seizures

There is no cure, but with the right help, people with cerebral palsy are living better lives now than ever before.

What causes cerebral palsy?

Doctors don't know exactly what causes cerebral palsy. Most people with cerebral palsy are born with it. Cerebral palsy can happen if the baby's brain doesn't grow right, or is injured while the mother is pregnant.

Some babies get cerebral palsy during birth if:

- The baby doesn't get enough oxygen from the air. This might happen if the baby has problems breathing.
- [The mother has an infection](http://www.raisingdeafkids.org/hearingloss/causes/index.jsp#infection) (<http://www.raisingdeafkids.org/hearingloss/causes/index.jsp#infection>)
- The baby weighs too little (less than 2 pounds)
- The baby is born too early

Children can also get cerebral palsy up to the age of 5 from a head injury. But this doesn't happen very often.

Signs of Cerebral Palsy

You may find out when your baby is born that he has some brain damage. Or sometimes, you don't know that your child has a problem until he gets older and seems different. If your baby has brain damage, you may notice that he:

- Doesn't have much energy
- Seems very fussy
- Has a high-pitched (squealing) cry
- Trembles or twitches
- Has problems feeding, sucking and swallowing
- Is floppy (this is called **low muscle tone**)
- Holds his legs tightly together like a closed scissor (this is called **high muscle tone**)
- Has trouble reaching for or holding things in his hands
- Favors one side of his body
- Holds his hands in tight fists

As he gets a little older, other signs of motor (movement) problems may show up. Watch to see if he has problems:

- reaching for toys by about 3 or 4 months
- sitting by about 6 or 7 months
- starting to walk between 10 and 14 months.

If your baby shows signs like this, your doctor will want to give him tests of motor function. This means testing to see if your baby can move the different parts of his body the right way. Even if your baby seems to have problems moving his body, your doctor may still want to wait until your child is about 18 months or older before saying for sure that the movement problems are from cerebral palsy.

Cerebral palsy and hearing loss

If your child has cerebral palsy, you already have a lot of things to worry about. You might be worried about your child's learning, walking, and even breathing. It might be hard to find time to think about other things. But try not to forget about your child's hearing!

Children with cerebral palsy are more likely to have a hearing loss than other children. About 1 out of 10 children with cerebral palsy have a hearing loss. Children with cerebral palsy can have a sensorineural or conductive hearing loss. The hearing loss can range from mild to profound.

You should also look for signs of hearing loss in your child, like your child:

- not noticing certain sounds
- not responding to his name
- watching people's faces closely to understand what they are saying If you think your child's hearing is getting worse, take him to an audiologist as soon as possible.

Sometimes children with cerebral palsy have liquid in their ear canals. This is because they get colds often, or have a hard time swallowing. This liquid can cause ear infections. Your doctor may want to do a test called tympanometry.

Get your child's hearing tested often

(<http://www.raisingdeafkids.org/hearingloss/testing/hearingtests/index.jsp>), starting when your child is 4 months old. Ask the audiologist how often to get your child's hearing tested. If you can, have the testing done by an audiologist who knows about testing children with disabilities like cerebral palsy. You may be able to find someone like this at a children's hospital.

Getting a true hearing test is hard for children with cerebral palsy. Why? Because many children with cerebral palsy can't control their bodies enough to raise their hands when they hear the sounds.

Talk with your child's teacher. She may be able to come up with ways to help your child signal the audiologist. Hearing tests that don't need your child to cooperate, like OAEs, can be done on children with cerebral palsy.

Getting around on his own - special equipment

Children with cerebral palsy can use different equipment to get from place to place. So help your child with a hearing loss to understand and use these things. Some children use walkers to help them walk alone. If the movement problem causes problems walking, a power wheelchair can help children go places on their own. Teaching your child to work the power chair will be very important.

Try to find someone who understands hearing loss and how to communicate with your child to help with this. This person may teach your child about the wheelchair by:

- Telling him how to use it
- Showing your child how to control the wheelchair
- Having your child use the chair by himself

Teaching your child in several different ways is important for children who have cerebral palsy and are also deaf.

Wearing glasses and hearing aids

Eyeglasses and hearing aids can help your child see and hear better. But keeping them on can be tough. That's because children with cerebral palsy sometimes can't control how their arms and legs move. So they can knock off their glasses or hearing aids by accident.

Try these ideas to keep your child's hearing aids or glasses on:

- Put special tape made for sticking to skin over the hearing aid to keep it on. Look for something called "toupee tape."
- Keep glasses on with a headband.
- Attach the hearing aid to the glasses.
- Make sure your child's earmolds fit well so they don't slip out easily.
- If your child uses a wheelchair with a headrest, make sure the pillow doesn't push on your child's ears. And make sure the headrest holds the head steady enough so the hearing aid doesn't get knocked out.

Communicating with your child with cerebral palsy and hearing loss

If your child has cerebral palsy and a hearing loss, he may need help that's different from other children with a hearing loss. It might be harder for him to learn how to talk, because both cerebral palsy and hearing loss can make talking hard. It might also be harder for him to learn sign language, because cerebral palsy can make it hard to control how his arms and hands move.

These movement (motor) problems make it harder for your child to express his thoughts. So try to make it easier for your child to communicate:

- Make up signs or gestures that are easy for your child to do. Watch how your child copies your signs. This will tell you what he can do at that time. Starting with signs that are easy for his hands and arms will help him communicate and feel proud of himself, too. His signing may improve over time.
- Ask your child's teachers and therapists for ideas about how to help your child communicate with you at home.
- When your child is very young, watch which way he's looking. Use this as a way to understand what your child wants.
- Watch where your child points or touches. This may show you what he wants to talk about. Then you will need to fill in the words or signs for him.
- Sometimes pictures can help. You can make a board with pictures or photographs of some things that your child may want, and teach him to use the board to ask for his bottle, cup, snack, television, etc.

Usually, children can understand others easier than they can tell others what they want. But your child may need extra clues to figure out what's going on:

- Your child will need some help to know where sound is coming from. This is because moving his body or even turning his head is hard work. And his hearing loss makes it even harder.
- Your child will need extra time to turn to the person who is talking to him. Slowing down all communication will help a lot. If things are said very fast, your child will miss important information.

Communicating with pictures

Finding other ways to help your child to communicate is called augmentative communication. Your child needs to have a way to understand what other people are saying. He also needs a way to say things so that other people can understand. If talking and signing are both too hard, ask the audiologist about other ways to communicate:

- Sometimes children can learn to use pictures to say what they are thinking.
- Your child could use a special computer that helps him communicate.
- Make a picture board so that your child can see, touch and feel things that can help him understand the daily schedule. (A picture of a toothbrush could remind him that you brush your teeth and get dressed in the morning.) Start out easy with things that he can see. Then build on what your child learns before talking about things that he cannot see or know.

Most children will need to get information in different ways - through pictures, gestures, sign language, speech, touch, and by doing things for themselves. This is called a "multi-sensory" approach to learning.

Communicating with friends and family

Help other people in your family communicate with your child.

- Ask your family and friends to make sure your child can see them before they start talking or signing. Sometimes children with cerebral palsy have trouble with their vision, and sometimes look out of the side of their eyes, which makes it harder. Being patient helps a lot because even turning and looking is hard work for some children.
- Explain to your family and friends that your child needs them to talk and sign slowly and clearly.
- Ask people to use more expression and gesture to keep your child's attention and interest.
- Ask them to be patient, and wait for your child to respond. Sometimes it is hard to understand the answer, so you may need to translate for others at first.

Learn more about cerebral palsy:

- Learn more about cerebral palsy from this website: [Cerebral Palsy: a Multimedia Tutorial for Children and Parents](http://www.people.virginia.edu/~smb4v/tutorials/cp/index.html) (<http://www.people.virginia.edu/~smb4v/tutorials/cp/index.html>).
- Learn more about what help your child with cerebral palsy can get on [4My Child.com](http://www.4mychild.com/) (<http://www.4mychild.com/>).
- Read stories from people who've grown up with cerebral palsy and hearing loss on the [Cerebral Palsy and Deaf Organization](http://www.cpado.org/) (<http://www.cpado.org/>).
- Find more resources on [United Cerebral Palsy's website](http://www.ucp.org/ucp_channel.cfm/1/11) (http://www.ucp.org/ucp_channel.cfm/1/11).

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You can find this page online at:

<http://www.raisingdeafkids.org/special/cp/>