

# Overview - Cerebral Palsy

Cerebral palsy affects body movement, balance and co-ordination. It is caused by damage to the brain before, during or after birth.

Symptoms vary in type and severity: muscles can be very stiff or weak, or spasm uncontrollably causing unwanted shaky movements. One or more limbs can be affected. Posture and balance can also be impacted along with co-ordination. Some people with CP have irregular speech.

Accompanying conditions can occur such as seizures, vision or hearing impairment. Older adults with CP are likely to develop secondary conditions such as osteoarthritis as a result of the wear and tear CP symptoms inflict on the body.

## **Students with cerebral palsy may experience the following issues:**

- An increase in abnormal movements when stressed or excited.
- Mobility difficulties - taking longer than others to move between taught sessions.
- Difficulty standing for long periods of time.
- Difficulties with fine motor tasks.
- Tiredness - someone with CP may use up to three times the energy of someone without CP just moving around.
- Chronic musculoskeletal pain restricting movement and affecting sleep.
- Gastro-intestinal problems causing discomfort or pain.
- Good days and bad days due to varying levels of fatigue and pain.
- Reactive mental health problems – coping with this condition can be exhausting and isolating.
- Frequent hospital appointments.



## Top tips for teaching students with cerebral palsy

- As this is a variable condition, be flexible about attendance to allow for incapacitating symptoms and be ready to provide tutorials to compensate for missed taught sessions.
- If the student is not participating actively in taught sessions, acknowledge this could be due to tiredness or physical discomfort.
- Make adjustments to support the student in fine motor or other physically demanding tasks. The student may need a technician to assist them or have specialist equipment provided.
- Allow the student to take breaks from course activities to rest and ensure they have a comfortable seat near to hand.
- Be aware the student may need to move or change position frequently to ensure muscles have regular changes in tone.
- Encourage students to pace themselves with course tasks and have realistic expectations of achievement.
- Support extended deadlines when CP symptoms incapacitate the student and hinder completion of assignments.
- Avoid last minute changes to taught session venues and times, and allow students plenty of time to move between sessions.
- Arrange field trips or placements in consultation with the student and Accessibility to ensure the student's needs will be met.

### Useful links

- <https://www.scope.org.uk/support/families/diagnosis/cerebral-palsy>
- <http://disabilityhorizons.com/2017/04/cerebral-palsy-life-as-a-disabled-student/>
- <http://www.dystonia.org.uk/index.php/about-dystonia/types-of-dystonia/secondary-dystonias/dystonic-cerebral-palsy>

