

Cerebral Palsy

I realize that I can do things and I can do them very well. Some things I can't do ... but I will have to live with that. At 16, I believe, I've learned more than many people will learn in their whole lives.

Taken from 'It's OK to be different', by Angie Erickson,
(student with Cerebral Palsy) Newsweek 24 October 1994



Cerebral palsy is a term used to refer to a group of complicated conditions that affect movement and posture because of damage to or failure in the development of the part of the brain that controls movement. This happens before birth, during birth or during early childhood before the brain's growth has reached a certain level of maturity. The condition itself does not normally change but individuals with cerebral palsy can become increasingly better at managing their difficulties as they get older. Generally speaking cerebral palsy is characterised by involuntary jerking movements, a poor sense of balance, spastic muscles and speech impairment. Many forms of cerebral palsy are now recognised and it is described either:

(a) in terms of the part of the body affected:

- Hemiplegia: affecting one side of the body.
- Diplegia: affecting the whole body.
- Quadriplegia: affecting both arms and legs.

Or

(b) in terms of how the body is affected:

- Spasticity: difficulty moving limbs and problems with posture and general movements.
- Athetosis: involuntary movements such as twitches or spasms.
- Ataxia: difficulty co-ordinating muscle groups and problems with balance, walking, etc.

It is sometimes the case that students present with a mixture of these conditions, as well as other associated difficulties, so the term embraces a wide spectrum. The associated difficulties include difficulties with constipation, epilepsy, general/specific learning disabilities, sleeping, speech and understanding the spoken word, and visual perception.

It is estimated that 1 in 400 students are affected by cerebral palsy and it is important to note that there is a huge variation in the manner in which cerebral palsy affects each individual. Some but not

all students will have communication difficulties (including social mixing difficulties), movement and control difficulties, difficulties in processing and in ordering information, and spatial and perceptual difficulties.

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