

Role for multidisciplinary team members

No one health professional can address all the needs of people with cerebral palsy. For some individuals with severe cerebral palsy, complexity and multiple system involvement means that there is a need for a multidisciplinary team.

Patient centred care and family-centred services

Always keep the individual with cerebral palsy or, in the case of a child, both the child and the parents, at the centre of the team. Individuals and families usually know what is best, and it is only they that can implement recommended treatments and therapies into their daily routines.

Healthcare practitioners

Children and adults with cerebral palsy have the same health problems as other individuals of a similar age, providing an essential role for the healthcare practitioner (known in some countries as general practitioners or family physicians). People with cerebral palsy are just as likely to develop coughs and colds, and may be more impacted than others due to immobility, swallowing problems and nutritional issues. Healthcare practitioners may know the whole family, and thus are well-placed to understand health-related issues in other family members that may be associated with caring for a person with cerebral palsy, such as back problems or mental health disorders including anxiety and depression.

Paediatrician

For children with cerebral palsy, a paediatrician is usually involved and it is important that a shared care arrangement be established between the healthcare practitioner and the paediatrician to ensure effective flow of information about the child's health and care plan. In adolescence, discussions about transition from paediatric to adult services will occur. The care team in adulthood will need to be established in close consultation with the paediatric team and with the child and family. In adulthood, the healthcare practitioner is usually the conductor of the multiple medical and allied health professionals involved in addressing the young person's needs.

Rehabilitation specialists

Paediatric and adult rehabilitation specialists aim to facilitate function and participation at the optimal level of the person's capabilities in physical, mental, social, educational and vocational domains. They may recommend various interventions, prescribe medications, recommend adaptive devices or modifications to the environment and involve allied health professionals in their treatment plans.

Other medical specialists

Other medical specialists that may be useful include:

- Gastroenterologist for managing gastro-oesophageal reflux and constipation.
- Ophthalmologist for assessing visual disorders.
- Neurologists for complex epilepsy management.
- Orthopaedic surgeons.
- ENT surgeons, particularly for those with hearing impairment.

Dentist

Dental and oral care is very important in order to maintain oral health and prevent dental decay, gum disease, and tooth loss. People with cerebral palsy often have a number of factors that impact their oral health including:

- Motor difficulties that may make cleaning and flossing difficult or impossible.
- Oral sensitivity and a persistent bite reflex that may compound the difficulty of cleaning teeth.



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These resources are designed to support healthcare practitioners in the care of their patients with cerebral palsy in Australia. They were developed in partnership by The Royal Children's Hospital; the Centre for Developmental Disability, Monash Health; and Murdoch Children's Research Institute. They have been amended for use by healthcare workers globally in partnership with IAACD. The initial project was funded by an Avant Quality Improvement Grant 2017.

- Oromotor dysfunction including chewing and swallowing difficulties leading to impaired clearing of food from the oral cavity.
- The differences in tongue movement can affect tooth development and alignment so malocclusions are common. Orthodontic intervention is frequently required for both functional and cosmetic reasons.
- Difficulties with saliva control may predispose to a dry mouth.
- Gastro-oesophageal reflux is common and frequent acid reflux into the mouth can damage tooth enamel.
- Epilepsy and seizures may be associated with falls and traumatic damage to teeth.
- Anti-seizure medication may predispose to gum disease or osteoporosis.
- People with cerebral palsy may be prone to developing osteoporosis for reasons such as lack of weight bearing, anti-seizure medication, inadequate intake of calcium and Vitamin D. Osteoporosis of the jaw may predispose to loss of teeth.
- Bisphosphonates used to treat osteoporosis predispose to the development of osteonecrosis of the jaw.

Dental care is a vital component of healthcare and part of both health promotion and disease prevention for people with cerebral palsy.

Nurses

Nurses may assist with continence problems. They may also be helpful in the early years as maternal child health nurses, as school nurses and in inpatient hospital settings where they can add knowledge and practical care across a range of issues.

Allied health

Several allied health professionals may contribute to the team, dependent on the particular health and functional issues for each individual. For example:

- Mobility including wheelchairs and assistive devices: physiotherapist, orthotist, exercise physiologist, personal trainer.
- Swallowing and nutrition: speech pathologist, dietitian.
- Saliva control: speech pathologist.
- Communication: speech pathologist.
- Personal care and independence, upper limb and hand function: occupational therapist.
- Hearing assessment: audiologist.
- Vision assessment: optometrist and orthoptist.
- Linking with support groups and counselling services: social worker.
- Assessment of learning problems and counselling: psychologist, neuropsychologist.

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