

# Cerebral Palsy

This factsheet has been developed in consultation with key agencies with experience and knowledge in the specific areas. The information is provided for **guidance** only, allowing you to be more informed in your approach to being a more **inclusive** coach. No two people are the same, as such, please ensure your first step is to speak to the person – understand their **abilities** and goals and never assume.



## What is Cerebral Palsy?

Cerebral palsy (CP) is a lifelong condition that affects body movement and muscle coordination.

It is caused by damage to one of the parts of the developing brain which controls and organises a person's movement and posture. The damage to the developing brain can happen before, during or after birth and is usually diagnosed before the age of three.

Cerebral palsy will affect a person's coordination, tone and strength of muscle action.

Cerebral palsy is not progressive.

Each individual with CP will be affected differently, and it can vary from mild to severe.

For some people, cerebral palsy will affect them physically, making muscle movements more difficult due to muscle tightness or spasticity and involuntary movements. People with CP may present with balance difficulties, and a disturbance in gait or mobility and have perception issues (difficulties making sense of and interpreting the messages received from the senses, moving around objects, judging size and shapes of objects etc.).

Others may also be affected by epilepsy, breathing difficulties, hearing and vision impairment, a poor swallow or difficulties with speech and language.

It is often assumed that people with CP who are unable to talk, or have difficulty controlling their movements, have an intellectual disability. This is not always the case and should never be assumed. CP does not necessarily affect intelligence, though some people might have an intellectual disability.

## How to include people with Cerebral Palsy in your coaching sessions

- The important factor is that no two people are the same, so the coach will have to consider the persons physique, mobility and application
- Speak to the participant to understand their abilities
- For some people with cerebral palsy, outdoor temperature could be a limiting factor to an effective training session during winter months
- Constant and continual repetition and reinforcement can reduce coordination difficulties
- Participants may have a slower reaction time when initiating movement on command
- The participant may have limb movement restrictions. Therefore, they must work at their maximum capacity to enable optimum performance. The participant must be supported to move any affected limb to the best of their ability
- The participant may have short-term memory loss, requiring constant and continual reinforcement of instructions
- Circulatory problems may mean additional stretching and flexibility exercises, and/or shorter drill times are required
- Be aware of any balance difficulties and take these into consideration with any relevant drills or game play



## Forms of cerebral palsy (CP)

### Spastic Cerebral Palsy:

- Affects 70 to 80 percent of people with CP
- Muscles are stiff and permanently contracted
- More involvement of the lower limbs than the upper limbs

### Athetoid Cerebral Palsy:

- Affects about 10 to 20 percent of people with CP
- Uncontrolled, slow writhing movements which can affect the hands, feet, arms, or legs, and, in some cases, the muscles of the face and tongue, causing grimacing or drooling. These movements often increase during periods of emotional stress and disappear during sleep
- Some people may also have problems coordinating the muscle movements needed for speech, a condition known as dysarthria

### Ataxic Cerebral Palsy:

- Affects an estimated 5 to 10 percent of People with CP
- Affects a person's sense of balance and depth perception
- Often have poor coordination or walk unsteadily with a wide-based gait, placing their feet unusually far apart
- Can experience difficulty when attempting quick or precise movements

### Mixed forms:

- It is not unusual for people with CP to have symptoms of more than one of the previous three forms. The most common mixed form includes spastic and athetoid movements, but other combinations are also possible.

**For further information and support, please visit:**

**[www.enableireland.ie](http://www.enableireland.ie) or contact [communications@enableireland.ie](mailto:communications@enableireland.ie)**

**This factsheet resource was  
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