

Cerebral Palsy spreading its tentacles in India; Rise in the number of affected births

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Bangalore: Studies say that about 2 children out of 1000 born world over are affected by Cerebral Palsy (CP), a disorder that affects the coordinated and purposeful movement of children and with over 25 lakh cases having been reported in India, it has become the commonest type of childhood disability in the country, say doctors.

The disorder is spreading its tentacles across the country, with a single treatment centre in Bangalore witnessing as many as 12,000 cases of Cerebral Palsy in last 15 years. Doctors at Parijma Neuro Diagnosis & Rehabilitation Center say that this these number gives just a partial picture of the gravity of this issue with several cases going unreported due to lack of awareness.

“The most common signs of cerebral palsy are visible during the first three years of life. If a child starts to crawl, walk or speak much later than expected, crawls in an unusual way, has abnormal muscle tone, faces difficulty in feeding & sucking, usually found lying down in an awkward position, gets startled easily, has bad coordination and balance, hearing problems, eyesight issues, bladder control problems, has seizures, has restricted movement or problems in swallowing then the child needs immediate intervention. Anyone or a bunch of these signs can act as agents leading to some or the other failure in nervous system and thus cerebral palsy comes into picture,” said **Dr. Suresh Rao Aroor, a leading Adult & Pediatric Neurologist and the brain behind Parijma Neuro Diagnosis & Rehabilitation Center, Bangalore.**

However Dr. Rao says that rehabilitation of cerebral palsy patient to the normal life is possible with right medical treatment. “More than 90 per cent of cerebral palsy patients with physical disability can lead a normal life with early diagnosis and proper medical treatment. To create a society with equal opportunities for all begins, it is important to bring a change in the closed mind-set that people have towards children and adults with various forms of physical disability,” he added.

If your little baby does not behave like toddlers of her age - does not smile back, doesn't identify you, doesn't play around – or just sits in a corner calm and quite without reacting to the sounds around her, you need to sit up and take note. These might be early indications of Cerebral Palsy.

Our nervous system plays the puppeteer for our body to function, knowingly or unknowingly it controls our body movements, leads to effective coordination in between the mind & the body and allows us to master or at least fulfill social-functioning in the best possible way. But, what if certain unwanted neurological conditions make home in the nervous system and attack our routine abilities?

Same happens in cerebral palsy! When cerebral, an area in the brain is affected by palsy meaning partial or complete muscle paralysis, the result affects the human body with rare and sometimes brutal physical disabilities.

When the brain of a fetus is developing inside the womb the blood or oxygen supply can become low, any prenatal injury, any injury or difficulty during delivery, a premature delivery, low birth weight, any injury caused to a child post 24 hrs of delivery, intake of alcohol or smoking during pregnancy, anemia, high blood pressure or diabetes in expectant mothers could be the cause of cerebral palsy in children.

The major signs and symptoms of cerebral palsy could also be so many, each different from the other. But, we should not overlook or ignore any of them, at any point in time. Cerebral palsy cannot be cured but that does not mean the end of life. Children with cerebral palsy can be brought back to normal life, if their condition is diagnosed and are nurtured in a progressive yet understanding environment.

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Let's see how indications play in kids of different ages:

n When the child is between 2-5 months old and doesn't smile back, doesn't identify her mother, and doesn't giggle like other toddlers

n When the child is between 9-10 months old and shows no interest in playing around or interacting with others, remains calm & quite and uninterested in her surroundings

n When the child is 1-2 yrs old and is not able to speak, doesn't play with other children, doesn't scream or shout during play, doesn't respond to people, and hardly shows any expressions

n When the child is ready to go to pre-school and still doesn't engage in any activity like dance or drawing, is not willing to be part of a group or have poor interaction levels

For children with such disorders, **Parijma Neuro Diagnosis & Rehabilitation Center** offers a real holistic approach to treatment and management.

"We conceived the idea of Parijma 23 years back when we realized the need for multidisciplinary team approach for most neurologic disorders and how this was

lacking in Bangalore and India in general. We started this very unique institute which has most disciplines required for the diagnosis, treatment and rehabilitation of such patients with the idea of giving total neurocare under one roof.

“Since then it has seen thousands of patients. In fact, Parijma has taken in at least 12,000 cerebral palsy patients in the last 15 years, ranging from toddlers to early teenagers,” says Dr Aroor.

Cerebral Palsy being a complex motor disorder with over 17 million people afflicted around the world, the instances in India alone account to some 2 to 2.5 cases per 1000 live births.

The treatment starts with a diagnosis, goes on to early intervention therapy, physio-therapy for motor development, manual mio-facial program, speech therapy and medication, if required. However, every cerebral palsy case usually is different from the other and thus the treatments vary for each patient.

“Apart from just medical intervention and support, we also organize awareness programs as they are the need of the hour. The specialized team at the centre educates the parents on how they should meet the need of their children. Sometimes, parents are also trained with physio-therapy techniques in order to help, train and further encourage their cerebral palsy afflicted child to live a normal life, based on minimal dependency,” says Dr Aroor.

Cerebral palsy might be a difficult experience but it shouldn't sound like a curse. It is high time that being a parent you should look beyond how your child can survive cerebral palsy than why he/she is the one diagnosed with it. It is time to shun assumptions and its consequences, and as a parent become the first-possible support to your child and don't shy away from seeking medical help.