



Let's Talk

Cerebral Palsy: Speech, Language, and Swallowing Issues

“ We realized something was different with Ben around the time he turned one. He wasn't crawling and didn't make many sounds. We found out that he had cerebral palsy and got him started with early intervention right away. Now he's 3, and he's still working with all of his therapists. He is making some sounds but not really talking. He also has trouble chewing. His speech-language pathologist is working on his eating and talking. ”

—Sylvia

Does Your Child Have Cerebral Palsy?

Cerebral palsy (CP) causes problems with your child's muscles. This includes:

- The small muscles in his lips, tongue, and jaw, used to talk and chew food
- The muscles in his chest, used to help him take a breath when talking
- The muscles in his throat, used to squeeze food into his stomach

These muscles may be too tight, or your child might have trouble controlling them. When these muscles are stiff, slow, or weak, your child can have problems.

Will My Child Be Able to Speak?

Children with CP may have trouble:

- Saying sounds
- Speaking loudly
- Being understood by others
- Putting words together
- Following directions

Fast facts

- Cerebral palsy is caused by damage to the brain.
- Your child may have problems with talking and eating.
- Speech-language pathologists, or SLPs, can help.



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You may be told that your child has dysarthria (dis-AR-three-uh). This means that the muscles of his mouth are weak, and he cannot say sounds clearly.

Some children with CP can speak quite well. Others may have trouble speaking clearly. Still others may not be able to talk at all and may need to communicate in other ways.

Will My Child Have Trouble Swallowing?

Your child uses a lot of muscles to swallow, and they need to work together. Your child may have trouble swallowing if his muscles are weak or don't move the right way. You may also hear this called dysphagia (dis-FAY-juh).

Your child may:

- Have trouble chewing food
- Not be able to suck from a straw
- Choke on food or drinks
- Spill food out of his mouth when eating
- Drool a lot
- Not be able to feed himself

Some children with CP have a hard time getting enough food to gain weight. Your doctor may suggest that your child see a dietitian to help with his nutrition.

Speech-Language Pathologists Can Help

Speech-language pathologists, or SLPs, work with children who have CP. SLPs work in schools, hospitals, and clinics, and can even come to your home.

Your child's SLP may:

- Ask you about your child and what you are worried about
- See how your child eats and communicates
- Test your child's speech and language
- Treat the speech, language, and swallowing problems that your child may have



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- Teach your child how to speak more clearly
- Work with your child to help with drooling or swallowing
- Show you how to help your child communicate

Your child may need to communicate in other ways if her speech is very hard to understand or if she really can't talk at all. There are simple devices such as picture boards that she can use to tell you what she wants. There are also electronic devices that can spell or say words out loud. These devices are called augmentative and alternative communication, or AAC. Your child's SLP can help find out what might work best for your child.

“Ben has been doing better lately. He actually ate part of a hamburger the other day! He is making some sounds more clearly, but his SLP also started using pictures to help him tell us what he wants. He'll point to a cup if he wants a drink and a picture of the swings if he wants to go outside. Soon he'll start preschool and will get all of his therapies there.”

—Sylvia

Cerebral palsy can cause problems with speech, language, and swallowing. Help is available.

To learn more about speech, language, and swallowing problems or to find an SLP near you who has been certified by the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA), visit www.asha.org or call 800-638-8255 or (TTY) 301-296-5650.

My SLP's name is

Appointment

Compliments of
American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA)
and