Cerebral Palsy

What is Cerebral Palsy?
The brain controls the movement of every muscle in our bodies. In cerebral palsy, there is damage to or a lack of development in one of these areas of the brain, affecting muscle control and movement. In cerebral palsy, this damage has occurred when the brain is still developing, usually before birth or early childhood (usually before 2-3 years of age).

What are the various types of Cerebral Palsy?
There are three predominant types of cerebral palsy

- Spastic cerebral palsy
- Athetoid cerebral palsy
- Ataxic cerebral palsy

Each type is characterised by different movement patterns. Many children may have a mixture of several of these movement patterns. Movements can be uncontrolled or unpredictable, muscles can be rigid or tight and in some cases people have shaky movements or tremors.

How is it diagnosed?
Cerebral palsy can often be seen within the first 12 months of life. The process of diagnosing cerebral palsy often begins with observations made by the child’s primary health care physician/paediatrician and parents. Cerebral palsy may be suspected if a baby has slow motor development, has impaired muscle tone or displays unusual postures. The diagnosis process can often be quite lengthy and involves doctors taking complete medical histories, examination of the child, potentially MRI or CT scans and various other tests.

How can I support my child with Cerebral Palsy?
Parents report that it can be very helpful to obtain a clear picture of their child’s developmental strengths and areas of concern to assist in focusing on relevant goals to support their child. Tuning in to your child’s interests and supporting them with exploring their world is a great way to build on your child’s ability to move, communicate, behave and learn.

Providing lots of opportunities for you and your child to have fun in your everyday routines; sharing praise and encouragement, encouraging mobility by engaging in activities with your child, following the lead of your child (observing activities they enjoy) and promoting communication by giving the child the opportunity to express their wants and needs, are some examples of strategies that have been shown to be effective in promoting learning and development.

Resources and acknowledgments:
Cerebral Palsy Alliance:  http://www.cerebralpalsy.org.au/home
Department of Education and Training: (DET): www.education.vic.gov.au
Early childhood Intervention Australia (ECIA): www.eciavic.org.au
The Royal Children’s Hospital Cerebral Palsy Book: