

FACT SHEET

Physical Disability

What is a physical disability?

A physical disability is any condition that permanently prevents normal body movement and/or control.

How is it manifested?

Most Common Types:

- **Muscular dystrophies:** when a child has a muscular dystrophy, this means that the muscle fibres in the body gradually weaken over time. Children can have different types of muscular dystrophy. The most common type is Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy, which occurs only in boys. All types of muscular dystrophy are genetic even though other family members may not have the condition.
- **Acquired brain and spinal injuries:** physical disabilities may result from permanent injuries to the brain, spinal cord, or limbs that prevent proper movement in parts of the body.
- **Spina Bifida:** sometimes, a baby's spinal cord (the nerves that run down the spine) does not develop normally during pregnancy. When this happens, the child can have a physical disability called Spina Bifida. The type and amount of disability caused by Spina Bifida will depend upon the level of the abnormality of the spinal cord. Children with Spina Bifida may have:
 - partial or full paralysis of the legs
 - difficulties with bowel and bladder control
 - Hydrocephalus (high pressure on the brain because fluid is not being drained away as normal)

- bone and joint deformities (they may not grow normally)
- curvature (bending) of the spine

- **Cerebral palsy:** Cerebral Palsy is caused by damage to the parts of the brain that control movement during the early stages of development. In most cases, this damage occurs during pregnancy. However, damage can sometimes occur during birth and from brain injuries in early infancy (such as lack of oxygen from near drowning, or being shaken). Children with Cerebral Palsy may have difficulties with:
 - posture (the ability to put the body in a chosen position and keep it there)
 - movement of body parts or the whole body
 - muscle weakness or tightness
 - involuntary muscle movements (spasms)
 - balance and coordination
 - talking and eating

How is it diagnosed or detected?

Some conditions may be detected at birth. Paediatricians can refer a child to a specialist if concerned about a child's muscle tone and reflexes.

Additional Resources:

SPINA BIFIDA AND HYDROCEPHALUS ASSOCIATION OF ONTARIO (SB&H)

– www.sbhao.on.ca

The organization has grown to provide a comprehensive and essential range of services for parents, families, youth and adults with sb/h. Programs are rooted in the principles of self-help and personal support. The SBHAO also serves the broader community which includes: parents who receive pre-natal diagnosis of sb/h; extended family members; all women of child-bearing age about

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the benefits of folic acid in the prevention of neural tube defects; and a wide spectrum of professionals in the social services, medical, health and education fields.

ONTARIO FEDERATION FOR CEREBRAL PALSY

– www.ofcp.on.ca

The Ontario Federation for Cerebral Palsy is a non-profit, charitable organization with a mandate to address the changing needs of people in Ontario with cerebral palsy.

MUSCULAR DYSTROPHY CANADA

– www.mdac.ca

Muscular Dystrophy Canada is committed to improving the quality of life for the tens of thousands of Canadians with neuromuscular disorders and funding leading research for the discovery of therapies and cures for neuromuscular disorders. The organization strives to ensure that people with neuromuscular disorders lead full and engaged lives by providing services that increase mobility and encourage independence.