

Erb's Palsy Treatment Guidelines Handout

What is Erb's palsy?

Erb's palsy, also known as brachial plexus birth palsy, is a condition caused by injury to the brachial plexus nerves during childbirth. These nerves control movement and feeling in the shoulder, arm, and hand. Damage can lead to weakness or paralysis in the affected arm.

Symptoms of Erb's palsy

- Weakness or paralysis in the affected arm, especially the upper arm.
- Arm held close to body with the elbow straight and palm facing back.
- Reduced grip strength in hand.
- Loss of sensation in arm and hand.
- Absent or weak Moro reflex on the injured side.

Causes of Erb's palsy

- Difficult or prolonged labor.
- Shoulder dystocia (shoulders stuck in birth canal).
- Breech delivery.
- High birth weight.
- Maternal obesity or diabetes.

Potential problems

- Muscle weakness and atrophy.
- Joint contractures and stiffness.
- Stunted bone growth in the affected arm.
- Limited range of motion.
- Sensory deficits and numbness.

Treatment options

Physical and occupational therapy

- Passive range of motion exercises to prevent stiffness
- Stretching to improve flexibility
- Strengthening of weak muscles
- Sensory stimulation
- Splinting and positioning to prevent contractures
- Adaptive techniques for activities of daily living

Botulinum toxin injections

- Temporary paralysis of tight muscles to allow stretching
- Used in combination with therapy and splinting

Surgery

- Nerve graft or transfer to repair damaged nerves
- Tendon or muscle transfer to improve arm function
- Release of joint contractures
- Typically considered after six months without improvement

Using this handout

- Review guidelines with your child's doctor or therapist
- Use as a reference for a home exercise program
- Track your child's progress and milestones
- Bring to all follow-up appointments
- Ask questions and voice any concerns

Additional resources

- United Brachial Plexus Network - www.ubpn.org
- NINDS Erb's Palsy Information Page - www.ninds.nih.gov/erbs-pals

Additional information