



Empowering Children. Supporting Families. Building Brighter Futures.

Resource 027 | Movement and muscle conditions

Spasticity

What it means

Spasticity is a specific form of increased muscle tone in which resistance to passive stretch depends partly on how quickly the limb is moved. It can interfere with comfort, movement, care, and participation. It is a sign of an underlying neurological condition rather than a diagnosis that explains the whole child. [1]

Causes and risk factors

Spasticity is associated with disrupted motor pathways in the brain or spinal cord. Cerebral palsy is an important childhood cause; brain or spinal cord injury and other neurological conditions can also produce it. Pain, illness, fatigue, and poor positioning may make its impact more noticeable. [1,2]

General family education. A concern deserves assessment, but this guide does not diagnose a child or prescribe treatment.



Signs and everyday impact

A child may have stiff limbs, spasms, difficulty moving smoothly, restricted comfortable positions, or challenges with dressing and hygiene. Spasticity may coexist with weakness and fixed joint limitations. A stiff limb alone does not prove spasticity; other tone patterns must be distinguished. [1,2]

Assessment and diagnosis

The team assesses neurological findings, response to passive movement, range of motion, strength, pain, and the effect on daily activities. Orthopedic and functional assessment may be needed. Treatment planning identifies whether the goal is pain relief, easier care, movement, positioning, or prevention of complications. [1,2]

Treatment and therapy

Options include individualized therapy and positioning, orthoses, medicines, targeted botulinum toxin injections, and selected surgical or intrathecal treatments. These require specialist assessment and monitoring. Reducing tone can sometimes reveal or increase functional weakness, so benefits and tradeoffs must be considered. The aim is meaningful improvement rather than eliminating every sign of tone. [1,2,3]

Support at home

Use the handling, movement, and equipment plan demonstrated by the team. Report discomfort, skin pressure, constipation, illness, and changes in function. Never force stretches through pain. If a medicine or pump is used, follow the team's missed-dose and emergency instructions.

When to seek help

Sudden major worsening with illness, severe pain, or altered awareness needs assessment. Suspected pump malfunction or medication withdrawal, breathing difficulty, or serious neurological change requires urgent care.

Questions for your care team

- Which difficulties are specifically caused by spasticity?
- What benefits and risks does the proposed treatment have?
- How will comfort, care, or participation be measured afterward?



Podcast preparation

Use this outline to develop a later podcast script.

Suggested opening

Welcome to Mariel Early Intervention. Today we discuss spasticity. Spasticity is a specific form of increased muscle tone in which resistance to passive stretch depends partly on how quickly the limb is moved. This is general education; each child needs individualized care.

Opening: Define the topic and its developmental context.

Understanding: Explain causes and signs without inviting self-diagnosis.

Assessment: Describe evaluation and distinguish screening from diagnosis.

Support: Discuss treatment, therapy, and practical family supports.

Closing: Explain urgent signs and one clear next step.

Misconception to address: Less tone is not automatically better function; treatment needs a clear goal.

Before recording: update clinical references and local service details, arrange clinical review, and use fully consented or fictional examples.

Terms in plain language

- Velocity-dependent: changing with the speed of stretch.
- Intrathecal: delivered into the fluid around the spinal cord.
- Range of motion: how far a joint can move.

Sources and further reading

Sources accessed 3 October 2026. Numbered references support the clinical overview. Treatment availability and referral routes vary by country.

[1] Spasticity: MedlinePlus Medical Encyclopedia

<https://www.medlineplus.gov/ency/article/003297.htm>

[2] Cerebral Palsy

https://www.ninds.nih.gov/health-information/disorders/cerebral-palsy?Campaign_Content=100006380375789&linkId=100000294187174

[3] Is Your Baby's Physical Development on Track?

<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/baby/Pages/Is-Your-Babys-Physical-Development-on-Track.aspx>