

## ***Brachial Plexus Injury Awareness***

### **QUICK FACTS ABOUT BRACHIAL PLEXUS INJURIES**

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- Brachial plexus injuries are injuries affecting the network of nerves that control the muscles of the shoulder, arm, elbow, wrist, hand and fingers. Brachial plexus injuries can result in full to partial paralysis of one or both (bilateral) arms.
- Stretching, tearing or other trauma can cause injury to the nerves of the brachial plexus.
- Brachial plexus injuries often occur during the birthing process. Availability of brachial plexus statistics vary widely, but where figures are available the general consensus is that brachial plexus injuries occur in 2-5 out of 1000 births.
- More children suffer from brachial plexus injuries sustained at birth than Down Syndrome or Muscular Dystrophy—yet information on this disability is not so readily obtained.
- Other causes of brachial plexus injuries include: automobile, motorcycle or boating accidents; sports injuries (known as “burners” or “stingers”); animal bites; gunshot or puncture wounds; as a result of specific medical treatments / procedures / and surgeries; or due to viral diseases.
- Adults who incur traumatic brachial plexus injuries often suffer from severe and chronic pain and struggle to find support, information and adequate medical care.
- Brachial plexus injuries occur 10-20 times more frequently than spinal cord injuries.
- Regardless of causation, it is essential that treatment for a brachial plexus injury be obtained as soon as possible from qualified, experienced medical professionals who specialize in treating brachial plexus injuries.
- While each injury is unique, some individuals may benefit from surgical intervention. Several specialized brachial plexus clinics around the world utilize a variety of cutting-edge operative approaches in attempting to maximize an individual’s function.
- Many families and individuals with brachial plexus injuries face ongoing struggles with insurance companies to obtain coverage for treatment related to their disability. Most insurance companies are unaware or do not understand the treatment protocol for brachial plexus injuries.

- Prevention of obstetrical brachial plexus injuries involves increasing awareness of this disability and its causes. Pregnant women need to be aware of the risk factors for *shoulder dystocia* (when the baby's shoulder gets 'stuck' on the mother's pelvic bone during delivery), the birth emergency that can lead to obstetrical brachial plexus injuries. Medical professionals can help prevent brachial plexus injuries by maintaining a heightened awareness of the risk factors for *shoulder dystocia*, by being more willing to take steps (such as prudent intervention by caesarian section) to prevent its occurrence, and by insuring that they receive appropriate training in the recommended maneuvers to safely dislodge a *shoulder dystocia* should it occur.
- The major risk factors associated with *shoulder dystocia* are: [1] suspected large baby - over 8 lbs. 14 oz.; [2] maternal diabetes / gestational diabetes; [3] maternal obesity; [4] an overdue baby - over 40 weeks; [5] short maternal stature; [6] contracted or flat (platypelloid) pelvis; [7] maternal weight gain -more than 35 lbs.; [8] protracted first stage of labor; [9] prolonged second stage of labor; [10] a history of *shoulder dystocia* during a previous delivery; [11] a history of giving birth to large babies; and [12] eight years or more since your last birth.
- Risk factors associated with brachial plexus injuries where *shoulder dystocia* is not involved are: tumors in the mother's uterus (fibroids, etc.); tumors in the baby's neck; viral disease during pregnancy and/or breech birth.
- The database of the United Brachial Plexus Network, Inc. (a 501c3 non-profit organization that strives to inform, support and unite families and those concerned with brachial plexus injuries worldwide) continues to grow at an alarming rate. There are currently approximately 4000 names of children and adults affected by this disability recorded, with additions made nearly daily.
- Families and individuals affected by brachial plexus injuries may experience a strong sense of emotional isolation and encounter difficulties in obtaining current medical information due to lack of awareness of this injury and its treatment options that affects both the medical community and the general population.
- For information, support, and links to other related sites on the Internet, please visit:  
[www.ubpn.org](http://www.ubpn.org).

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