

Surgery helps young kids with cerebral palsy walk, regardless of age

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A surgery that helps 7- to 10-year-olds with cerebral palsy walk also helps older kids and teens with the condition, a groundbreaking study shows.

"We had thought that the older kids would not do as well, but there was really no difference in outcomes between the two groups," said senior study author Dr. Robert Kay, director of the Jackie and Gene Autry Orthopedic Center at Children's Hospital Los Angeles.

The procedure in question is dubbed SEMLS, short for single-event multilevel surgery. It is the standard of care for helping kids with [cerebral palsy](#) improve.

The new study looked at 126 young people with cerebral palsy who were seen at the motion and sports analysis lab at Children's Hospital Los Angeles between 2011 and 2023.

The lab, one of just 23 accredited pediatric [motion](#) labs worldwide, uses a 10-camera system to capture 3D images of how a patient walks and moves.

Participants in the study had undergone at least two gait studies—one before SEMLS and one after.

Researchers compared patients under 13 years of age with those between the ages of 13 and 21. They looked at two factors: gait deviation index (GDI), how a patient's [gait](#) compares to a typically developing individual; and functional mobility scale (FMS), rating how a child walks at distances that mimic community, school and home environments.

The study found GDI rose 6.1 points in the younger kids and 6.4 points in the older group. FMS scores were stable or better in between 80% and 90% of kids in both groups.

The findings were presented at the [Gait and Clinical Movement Analysis Society annual conference](#) in Atlanta. Research presented at meetings is typically considered preliminary until published in a peer-reviewed

journal.

Regardless, "this [finding] shows that even if patients are well into their teens, they can still benefit from SEMLS," Kay said in a hospital news release.

Even so, Kay added, the ideal time to have this surgery is when children are 7 to 10 years old.

"All things being equal, I would rather perform this surgery earlier rather than later," he said. "But we have kids who don't even come to us until they are teens. If they have the right indications for [surgery](#), we still have an opportunity to help them walk better."

More information: Johns Hopkins has more on [cerebral palsy](#).

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