

Cerebellar Hypoplasia (CH) in Cats & Kittens

What is Cerebellar Hypoplasia?

Cerebellar Hypoplasia (cer·e·bel·lar hy·po·pla·sia) is a disorder found in cats and dogs which causes jerky movements, tremors, and generally uncoordinated motion, just like ataxic cerebral palsy in humans. A cat with CH often falls down and has trouble walking or cannot seem to walk at all. CH in cats is non-progressive, meaning it does not get worse with age.



Cerebellar Hypoplasia occurs when the cerebellum, the part of the brain which controls fine motor skills and coordination, is not completely mature at birth. Symptoms of CH can usually be seen immediately at birth.

Cerebellar Hypoplasia is most commonly caused by the kitten's mother contracting the Panleukopenia virus while pregnant. If the mother passes on the virus during the end of pregnancy, the kittens can be born with CH. Kittens with CH are not infected with or carriers of the Panleukopenia virus, it has only stunted their cerebellum's growth while in the womb. Cerebellar Hypoplasia can also occur if a trauma, including malnutrition, occurs to the kittens while in the womb.

Cats with Cerebellar Hypoplasia are often euthanized, as people misunderstand the condition as being painful and/or contagious. However, they have a normal life expectancy and are very affectionate, sweet, and loving. They return the extra care they need with an intense love for and bond with their adoptive families.

THE TRUTH ABOUT CH CATS

At this time, many veterinary and rescue professionals are still unaware of CH. Many CH cats are needlessly euthanized before given a chance at a proper diagnosis and life, making it harder for awareness about the condition to grow.

Cats with CH:

- Are not in any pain
- Are not contagious
- Have a normal life expectancy
- Live happy, healthy lives
- Learn to adapt their abilities and compensate over time
- Need to be indoor-only
- Should never be declawed
- May require no extra care, or a great deal of extra care, depending on their severity
- Can be more prone to accident-related injuries, like chipped teeth or broken nails



RESOURCES

To learn more, or get assistance with a CH cat, please visit the following resources:

CH Kitty Club <http://www.chkittyclub.com>

Cerebellar Hypoplasia Cats <http://chcat.org>

Cerebellar Hypoplasia Cats and Kittens Facebook Group <https://www.facebook.com/181495576436>

Life with CH Cats Blog <http://lifewithchcats.com>

To find a CH cat or kitten near you, or for any advice, please email chkitties@hotmail.com

Severity Levels of Cerebellar Hypoplasia in Cats

MILD

Cats with mild CH are very capable and require little to no extra care.

Symptoms:

- Unusual gait (high step or waddle)
- Occasional balance loss
- May have subtle head tremors when excited or stressed

Abilities:

- Walk
- Run
- Jump
- Stairs



Special Care:

- Cannot live outdoors
- May prefer a modified litter box with high sides
- Prefer carpet or rugs, but not a necessity



MODERATE

Cats with moderate CH can get around on their own, but one end of their body may appear to be doing something else than the other end.

Symptoms:

- Walk with legs splayed in a wide stance
- Frequent balance loss, falls
- Noticeable head tremors, especially when excited or stressed

Abilities:

- Walk short distances
- Expert climbers



Special Care:

- Cannot live outdoors
- Prefer a modified litter box with high sides to support themselves against; can be messier than non-CH cats
- Have an easier time balancing on carpet or rugs
- Raised food & water dishes
- Modified furniture to protect them from getting hurt when they fall (e.g. adding bumpers)

SEVERE

Cats with severe CH cannot walk on their own and require a great deal of special care.

Symptoms:

- Cannot walk or stand
- Flip and Flop to get around
- Constant head tremors



Abilities:

- Expert climbers

Special Care:

- Cannot live outdoors
- May need help using the litter box; prefer a modified litter box with high sides or pee-pee pads
- Prefer carpet to help grip and propel themselves forward
- May need help getting set up at their food dish
- Modified furniture to protect them from getting hurt when they fall (e.g. adding bumpers)
- Are ideal candidates for wheelchairs, which can help improve mobility and coordination