Health Bulletin

Beating The Odds: One Woman's Battle With Spasticity

(NAPSA)—Kristen Welton did not let anyone stand in the way of her dreams. Challenged since birth by cerebral palsy, she has overcome many obstacles to lead an active life.

At birth, Kristen suffered from a lack of oxygen to the brain, which led to cerebral palsy—a condition resulting from poor development or damage to areas in the brain that control movement and posture.

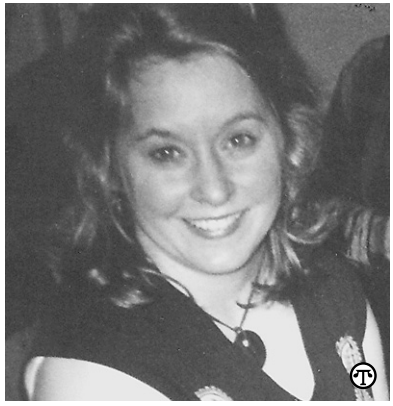
She experienced many side effects associated with cerebral palsy, including difficulty with motor tasks, problems maintaining balance and poor coordination. However, her most debilitating side effect was spasticity.

Spasticity is a condition characterized by tight, stiff muscles—specially in the arms and legs—that can make everyday activities, including eating, dressing or walking time consuming or impossible. Spasticity is a common side effect of cerebral palsy but can also result from multiple sclerosis, brain injury, spinal cord injury and stroke.

By age 31, Kristen had undergone more than 30 surgical procedures to treat her condition, including multiple surgeries to lengthen the stiff, tight tendons in her legs and hips. She was also attending physical therapy and taking oral medications. However, she continued to experience tight muscles and was still having trouble with her mobility.

Despite her physical challenges, Kristen was eager to complete school. In suburban Texas where she grew up, she became the first disabled child to be instructed in a mainstream classroom.

She enrolled in a Texas university shortly thereafter, but the debilitating effects of spasticity forced her to drop out. Still she did not lose hope.



ITB Therapy helped Kristen resume her daily activities with greater ease.

Kristen wanted to finish school, and after relocating to Georgia, she enrolled in another university. At that time, Kristen—with the advice of her physician and after a successful preliminary screening for ITB™ Therapy (Intrathecal Baclofen Therapy)—decided to receive this treatment.

ITB Therapy is a treatment for severe spasticity. It is an implantable system that delivers a medication called Lioresal Intrathecal (baclofen injection) directly to the space where the fluid flows around the spinal cord. A small amount of medicine is delivered directly to the spinal fluid (where it is most effective), and since it does not circulate through the body in the bloodstream, it relieves spasticity with very tiny amounts of medication. This helps minimize side effects that often accompany oral medications.

Kristen experienced positive results with ITB Therapy and she began to resume her daily activities with greater ease.

"The first change with ITB Therapy was feeling the mattress under me while I slept," said Kristen. "With spasticity, I could only feel the tightness of my muscles, and sleeping, sitting and standing were all uncomfortable. With ITB Therapy, I was finally able to relax."

With a reduction in spasticity after receiving ITB Therapy, Kristen was able to return to college and received a degree in elementary education. Today, she teaches first grade. Kristen uses her experience to convey the message that people who are physically challenged can still achieve their dreams. She is living proof.

"I know there are other people with spasticity who cannot do certain activities that may be easy for most people," said Kristen. "But by sharing my story, I hope it will bring them hope and encouragement and give them a sense of peace."

Kristen wrote a poem describing her experience with spasticity to provide others with hope that they, too, can achieve their dreams. The poem was published in a 2004 awareness calendar, titled "Exploring Spasticity." For more information about spasticity, or to view the calendar, please visit www.exploring-spasticity.com or call 800-856-3823 x101.

Talk to your doctor for more information about spasticity and ITB Therapy. As with any treatment, results vary; not every individual will receive the same benefits. Additional information and a listing of physicians who treat severe spasticity are available at www.spasticity.com.