

Information for users

The Manual Ability Classification System (MACS) describes how children with cerebral palsy (CP) use their hands to handle objects in daily activities. MACS describes five levels. The levels are based on the children's self-initiated ability to handle objects and their need for assistance or adaptation to perform manual activities in everyday life. The MACS brochure also describes differences between adjacent levels to make it easier to determine which level best corresponds with the child's ability to handle objects.

The objects referred to are those that are relevant and age-appropriate for the children, used when they perform tasks such as eating, dressing, playing, drawing or writing. It is objects that are within the children's personal space that is referred to, as oppose to objects that are beyond their reach. Objects used in advanced activities that require special skills, such as playing an instrument are not included in this considerations.

When establishing a child's MACS level, choose the level that best describes the child's overall usual performance, in the home, school or community setting. The child's motivation and cognitive ability also affect the ability to handle objects and accordingly influence the MACS level. In order to obtain knowledge about how a child handles various everyday objects it is necessary to ask someone who knows the child well. MACS is intended to classify what the children usually do, not their best possible performance in a specific test situation.

MACS is a functional description that can be used in a way that is complement to the diagnosis of cerebral palsy and its subtypes. MACS assesses the children's overall ability to handle everyday objects, not the function of each hand separately. MACS does not take into account differences in function between the two hands; rather, it addresses how the children handle age-appropriate objects. MACS does not intend to explain the underlying reasons for impaired manual abilities.

MACS can be used for children aged 4–18 years, but certain concepts must be placed in relation to the child's age. Naturally there is a difference in which objects a four-year old should be able to handle, compared with a teenager. The same applies to independence –a young child needs more help and supervision than an older child.

MACS spans the entire spectrum of functional limitations found among children with cerebral palsy and covers all sub-diagnoses. Certain sub-diagnoses can be found at all MACS levels, such as bilateral CP, while others are found at fewer levels, such as unilateral CP. Level I includes children with minor limitations, while children with severe functional limitations will usually be found at levels IV and V. If typically developed children were to be classified according to MACS, however, a level "0" would be needed.

Moreover, each level includes children with relatively varied function. It is unlikely that MACS is sensitive to changes after an intervention; in all probability, MACS levels are stable over time.

The five levels in MACS form an ordinal scale, which means that the levels are 'ordered' but differences between levels are not necessarily equal, nor are children with cerebral palsy equally distributed across the five levels.

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Eliasson AC, Krumlinde Sundholm L, Rösblad B, Beckung E, Arner M, Öhrvall AM, Rosenbaum P. The Manual Ability Classification System (MACS) for children with cerebral palsy: scale development and evidence of validity and reliability *Developmental Medicine and Child Neurology* 2006 48:549-554



Manual Ability Classification System for Children with Cerebral Palsy 4-18 years

MACS classifies how children with cerebral palsy use their hands to handle objects in daily activities.

- MACS describes how children usually use their hands to handle objects in the home, school, and community settings (what they do), rather than what is known to be their best capacity.
- In order to obtain knowledge about how a child handles various everyday objects, it is necessary to ask someone who knows the child well, rather than through a specific test.
- The objects the child handles should be considered from an age-related perspective.
- MACS classify a child's overall ability to handle objects, not each hand separately.



What do you need to know to use MACS?

The child's ability to handle objects in important daily activities, for example during play and leisure, eating and dressing.

In which situation is the child independent and to what extent do they need support and adaptation?

- I. Handles objects easily and successfully.** At most, limitations in the ease of performing manual tasks requiring speed and accuracy. However, any limitations in manual abilities do not restrict independence in daily activities.
- II. Handles most objects but with somewhat reduced quality and/or speed of achievement.** Certain activities may be avoided or be achieved with some difficulty; alternative ways of performance might be used but manual abilities do not usually restrict independence in daily activities.
- III. Handles objects with difficulty; needs help to prepare and/or modify activities.** The performance is slow and achieved with limited success regarding quality and quantity. Activities are performed independently if they have been set up or adapted.
- IV. Handles a limited selection of easily managed objects in adapted situations.** Performs parts of activities with effort and with limited success. Requires continuous support and assistance and/or adapted equipment, for even partial achievement of the activity.
- V. Does not handle objects and has severely limited ability to perform even simple actions.** Requires total assistance.

Distinctions between Levels I and II

Children in Level I may have limitations in handling very small, heavy or fragile objects which demand detailed fine motor control, or efficient coordination between hands. Limitations may also involve performance in new and unfamiliar situations. Children in Level II perform almost the same activities as children in Level I but the quality of performance is decreased, or the performance is slower. Functional differences between hands can limit effectiveness of performance. Children in Level II commonly try to simplify handling of objects, for example by using a surface for support instead of handling objects with both hands.

Distinctions between Levels II and III

Children in Level II handle most objects, although slowly or with reduced quality of performance. Children in Level III commonly need help to prepare the activity and/or require adjustments to be made to the environment since their ability to reach or handle objects is limited. They cannot perform certain activities and their degree of independence is related to the supportiveness of the environmental context.

Distinctions between Levels III and IV

Children in Level III can perform selected activities if the situation is prearranged and if they get supervision and plenty of time. Children in Level IV need continuous help during the activity and can at best participate meaningfully in only parts of an activity.

Distinctions between Levels IV and V

Children in Level IV perform part of an activity, however, they need help continuously. Children in Level V might at best participate with a simple movement in special situations, e.g. by pushing a button or occasionally hold undemanding objects.