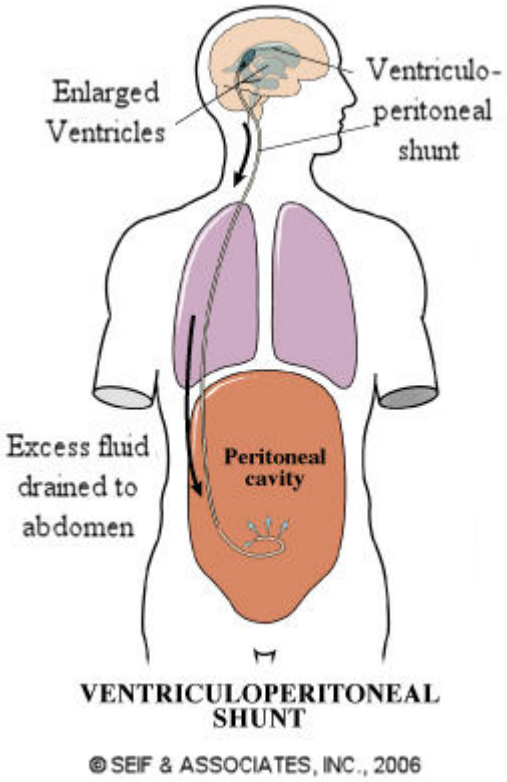
Ventriculoperitoneal (VP) Shunt, Malfunction

VP shunts malfunction for a number of reasons. A VP shunt is a bypass so fluid from the ventricles of the brain can be routed to the abdomen. The ventricles in the brain are like holding chambers for the fluid in the brain. This fluid is the same fluid that surrounds the brain and spinal cord. Sometimes these shunts do not work the way they are supposed to.

SYMPTOMS

Symptoms of shunt malfunction or infection may include:

- Headache
- Fever
- Drowsiness
- Convulsions or seizures
- Vomiting
- Irritability and/or sleepiness
- Redness along the shunt tract. This is the path the catheter takes that you can feel under the skin.
- Swelling along the shunt tract
- Loss of coordination or balance
- Vision problems



In an infant, signs and symptoms of complications may also include:

- Swollen or raised soft spot.
- Fussiness, irritability, or a high-pitched cry.
- Feeding problems

COMMON COMPLICATIONS OF VP SHUNT INCLUDE:

- Shunt malfunction or blockage. This may be related to growth and the shunt will need to be replaced with a longer catheter.
- Infection is a common cause of a shunt not working.

DIAGNOSIS

Your caregiver may use blood (*laboratory*) work, cultures, a shunt series, and a CT scan to find out what is wrong. A shunt series is a series of plain x-rays to visualize the entire shunt. This helps your caregiver know if the shunt is working properly. This may also be done with a radioisotope examination. In this exam, a radioactive material is injected and special detectors much like Geiger counters are used to see if the fluid is moving through the shunt the way it is supposed to.

TREATMENT

- When a shunt is not working properly the shunt may need to be replaced. As your child grows, the shunt often needs to be replaced with a longer catheter.
- Shunts that become infected may need to be removed and the patient treated with antibiotics. Following successful treatment of the infection, the shunt may be replaced.

SEEK MEDICAL CARE IF:

- Any of the above listed symptoms start to come back.
- You think your child is getting worse instead of better.
- Your child is running a temperature of unknown cause.

Document Released: 11/30/2006 Document Re-Released: 10/20/2009
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