Arachnoid Cysts

Arachnoid cysts are cerebrospinal fluid-filled sacs. They may develop between the surface of the brain and the cranial base or on the arachnoid membrane. This is one of the 3 membranes that cover the brain and the spinal cord. Most cases begin during infancy. But onset may be delayed until adolescence. These cysts most often happen in males.

SYMPTOMS

Problems (*symptoms*) of an arachnoid cyst are related to the cyst size and location.

- Small cysts are usually asymptomatic. This means they cause no symptoms. They are discovered only by chance.
- Large cysts may cause cranial deformation or enlargement of the head (*macrocephaly*). These produce symptoms such as:
  - Headaches.
  - Convulsions (*seizures*).
  - Developmental delay.
  - Increased intracranial pressure.
  - Behavioral changes.
  - Excessive accumulation of cerebrospinal fluid (*hydrocephalus*).

Other symptoms may include:

- Weakness or paralysis on one side of the body (*hemiparesis*).
- Lack of muscle control (*ataxia*).

TREATMENT

Treatment for arachnoid cysts is symptomatic. When symptoms warrant, the surgical placement of a shunt may be required to remove pressure from (*decompress*) the cyst.

If left untreated, arachnoid cysts may cause permanent, severe neurological damage. This is due to the progressive expansion of the cyst(s) or bleeding (*hemorrhage*). With treatment most individuals with arachnoid cysts do well.

RESEARCH BEING DONE

The NINDS supports research on brain and nervous system disorders such as arachnoid cysts. The goal of this research is to increase scientific understanding of these disorders and to find ways to prevent and treat them.

Research is continually being done to learn more about this problem.

Provided by The National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke

Document Released: 12/08/2003 Document Re-Released: 06/05/2009
ExitCare® Patient Information ©2011 ExitCare, LLC.