Tethered Spinal Cord Syndrome

Tethered spinal cord syndrome is a neurological disorder caused by an abnormal stretching of the spinal cord. The course of the disorder is progressive. In children, symptoms may include lesions, hairy patches, dimples, or fatty tumors on the lower back, foot and spinal deformities, weakness in the legs, low back pain, scoliosis and incontinence. Tethered spinal cord syndrome may go undiagnosed until adulthood, when symptoms such as sensory and motor problems and loss of bowel and bladder control emerge. This delayed presentation of symptoms is related to the degree of strain placed on the spinal cord over time. Tethered spinal cord syndrome appears to be the result of improper development of the neural tube and is closely linked with spina bifida.

TREATMENT

In children, early surgery is recommended to prevent further neurological deterioration. If surgery is not advisable, spinal cord nerve roots may be cut to relieve pain. Other treatment is symptomatic and supportive.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN

With treatment, patients with tethered spinal cord syndrome have a normal life expectancy. However, some neurological and motor impairments may not be fully correctable.

RESEARCH BEING DONE

The NINDS conducts and supports research on disorders of the spinal cord. The goals of this research are to find ways to prevent, treat, and cure these disorders.

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: 03/16/2010

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