Microcephaly

Microcephaly is a rare, neurological disorder. With it, circumference of the head is smaller than the average for the age and gender of the infant or child.

CAUSES

Microcephaly may be present at birth (*congenital*). Or it may develop in the first few years of life. The disorder may stem from a wide variety of conditions that cause abnormal growth of the brain. It is often a symptom of syndromes associated with chromosomal

SYMPTOMS

Infants with microcephaly are born with either a normal or reduced head size. The head fails to grow while the face continues to develop at a normal rate. The child may have the following conditions:

- Small head.
- Large face.
- Receding forehead.
- Loose, often wrinkled scalp.

As the child grows older, the following may happen:

- Small size of the skull becomes more obvious.
- Entire body also is often underweight and dwarfed.
- Development of motor functions and speech may be delayed.
- Hyperactivity and mental retardation are common. The degree of each varies.
- Convulsions may also occur.
- Motor ability varies. It ranges from clumsiness to spastic quadriplegia.

TREATMENT

Generally there is no specific treatment for this disorder. Treatment is symptomatic and supportive. A serious attempt should be made to:

- Identify associated congenital anomalies.
- Determine a specific cause of the disorder.

In general, life expectancy for individuals with this disorder is low. The prognosis for normal brain function is poor. The prognosis varies depending on the presence of associated abnormalities.

RESEARCH BEING DONE

The NINDS conducts and supports a wide range of studies. These explore the complex mechanisms of normal brain development. The knowledge gained from these fundamental studies provides the foundation for understanding how this process can go awry. It offers hope for new means to treat and prevent developmental brain disorders, including microcephaly.

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

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