

Fact Sheet 2

Types of Spina Bifida

There are three types of spina bifida. Each of these varies in severity.

Occulta

Occulta is the mildest form of spina bifida. There is no opening on the back, but the outer parts of some of the vertebrae are not completely closed. This site is often marked by a dimple or tuft of hair. The spinal cord and its protective covering ('meninges') are undamaged and there is usually no nerve damage. It is estimated that between 5-10% of the population may have spina bifida occulta. The majority of people who have spina bifida occulta don't ever experience complications. Some people become aware of it when they have unexplained incontinence, back ache or changes in the muscles of their legs.

Meningocele

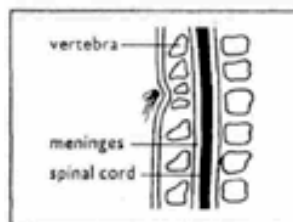
Meningocele is the moderate form of spina bifida. The bones do not close around the spinal cord at the site of the lesion. The meninges are pushed out through the opening to form a sac which also contains cerebrospinal fluid (CSF). The spinal cord is undamaged and is not pushed out into the sac. The nerves are not usually damaged and are able to function.

Myelomeningocele

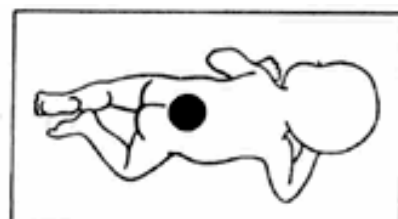
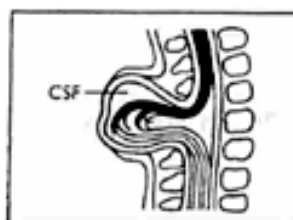
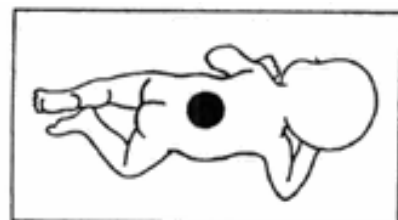
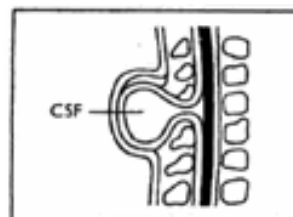
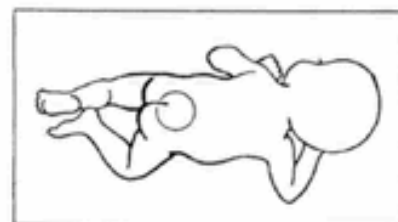
Myelomeningocele is the most severe type of spina bifida and is more common than the meningocele form. The meninges and spinal cord both protrude to form a sac which also contains CSF. The spinal cord fails to develop properly and the spinal nerves are damaged. The amount of disability depends very much on where the site of the lesion is (tending to be more severe when the opening is higher up the back), and the amount of nerve damage involved.



**Spinal cord
(close up)**



**Location of
spina bifida**



*The Spina Bifida Foundation of Victoria wishes to thank
The Hugh D. T. Williamson Foundation, The Danks Trust and
the Department for Victorian Communities
for their financial support of our Community Education program.*