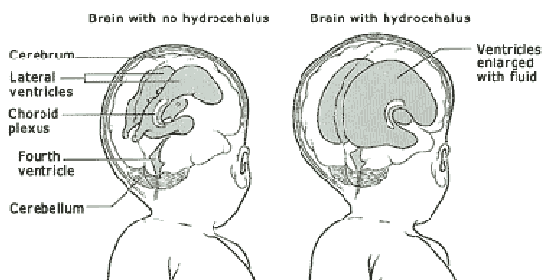


# What is Hydrocephalus?

The brain and spinal cord are protected and nourished by a clear liquid known as cerebrospinal fluid (CSF). Hydrocephalus is a build up of CSF in the brain caused by a blockage. This build up of CSF causes the cavities (ventricles) in the brain to enlarge, putting pressure on the brain tissue and if left untreated, this pressure can cause the skull to enlarge.

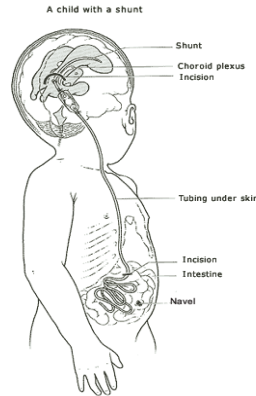


## **Spina Bifida & Hydrocephalus**

85-90% of people with spina bifida also have hydrocephalus. The reason for this is that a commonly associated condition of Spina Bifida is the *Arnold Chiari Malformation*, where the lower part of the brain is positioned abnormally, resting further down into the spinal column than it should be. This malformation causes the blockage that results in hydrocephalus.

## **How is Hydrocephalus treated?**

Hydrocephalus is usually surgically corrected with a *shunt*. A shunt is a long narrow tube inserted into the ventricles with a one-way valve under the skin which drains the excess CSF from the ventricles and redirects it into the abdomen where it is reabsorbed. The shunt is likely to stay in place throughout life however it can be surgically revised or replaced if it malfunctions due to a blockage, kinking or problem with the valve.



## **What are the effects of Hydrocephalus?**

Most people with hydrocephalus experience difficulties in specific areas of learning. There may be problems in one or more of the following areas:

- Hand-eye coordination
- Perception (difficulty judging distances)
- Comprehension
- Attention & concentration
- Memory
- Mathematics
- Organisation
- Problem solving & Decision making
- Motivation
- Social skills

Other common effects of hydrocephalus include visual impairment, epilepsy, headaches, early onset of puberty and sleep apnoea.

## **Facts about Hydrocephalus**

- The term 'hydrocephalus' is from two Greek words meaning 'water in the head'.
- Before shunts were invented in the late 1950s most children with spina bifida and hydrocephalus died soon after birth
- Because so many people with spina bifida have hydrocephalus too, spina bifida is often called spina bifida hydrocephalus or SBH.
- The degree to which hydrocephalus affects any individual varies greatly from minimal to quite severe and often fluctuates from day to day.

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