

HYDROCEPHALUS, SLIT VENTRICLE SYNDROME

By Dr. Derek Conte

Hydrocephaly is a condition where the ventricles (internal fluid chambers) of the brain cannot properly drain cerebrospinal fluid back into the venous circulation due to narrowing of passages to the rest of the aqueduct system which continues to the spinal cord. Pressure then builds up inside the brain, causing symptoms such as headaches, lethargy, mental weakness, vomiting, convulsions, enlargement of the head and crushing of the brain. Hydrocephalus can be triggered by infection (meningitis) or can be congenital.

Treatments reduce the pressure by increasing cranial volume or by running shunts (tubes) under the skin from the ventricles to the abdomen, where excess fluid harmlessly drains away. But sometimes the shunt can induce what is known as a 'siphon effect', which causes the ventricle to collapse into a slit-shape called, slit ventricle (other causes are trauma or infection). This is most severe in children because the brain is still soft, watery and not yet very resilient structurally. The correction for slit ventricle syndrome is usually to give anti-migraine drugs, to replace the shunt or to add a siphon-controlling device. Also, simply lying down can help as this reduces the force of the siphon effect.

James, a 9-year-old patient of ours, suffers from both these disorders. He was born 15 weeks prematurely and was in intensive care for months and suffered many infections. At 5 months of age it was discovered he had hydrocephaly and a shunt was installed. Then, when he was 6 years old, the shunt broke and he was rushed to the hospital in a coma-like state with slow

heart rate and infrequent, unnatural breathing. He had developed a slit ventricle syndrome. Subsequently, James underwent three surgeries to replace or reposition the shunts, but he still suffered.

James, who has a great sense of humor, presented to the office with intense, daily headaches, irregular energy levels, ear blockages, poor balance on the left and concentration problems. He had very significant postural distortion and weighed 20 lbs on the left and 29 lbs on the right when standing on bilateral scales. We began a routine of chiropractic adjustments interspersed with craniosacral therapy.

In the first month of care, James had only 2 headaches, his ears had opened up, his balance improved and his energy levels were much more even. According to his mother he was more alert, eating better, less sickly and had become more adventurous, joining the swim team for the first time. Over the next 8 months James averaged about 2 mild headaches a month. In the 5 months after that he had a total of 2 headaches. Today, his mom told me that James is learning to ride a bike. He still comes in monthly for his adjustments and always makes me laugh.

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