HYDROCEPHALUS

Hydrocephalus is the abnormal buildup of cerebrospinal fluid (CSF) in the cavities, or ventricles, in the brain.

CSF has three important functions:

* To keep the brain tissue buoyant, acting as a cushion or “shock absorber”
* To act as the vehicle for delivering nutrients to the brain and removing waste
* To flow between the cranium and spine and compensate for changes in the amount of blood within the brain

When there is an imbalance between the amount of CSF produced and the rate at which it is absorbed, the pressure of excessive CSF can damage brain tissues and cause a large spectrum of impairments in the brain. Hydrocephalus can be present at birth (congenital) or acquired during a person’s life due to hemorrhage, meningitis, head trauma, tumors or cysts.

**SYMPTOMS**

Among school-aged children, signs, and symptoms may include: abnormal enlargement of a child’s head; headache; nausea or vomiting; fever; loss of previously acquired skills, such as walking or talking; blurred or double vision; unstable balance; irritability; change in personality; decline in school performance; seizure and difficulty remaining awake or waking up.

**TREATMENT**

The most common treatment of hydrocephalus is the surgical placement of a tube, or shunt, into the person’s body. It consists of a long, flexible tube with a valve that keeps fluid from the brain flowing in the right direction and at the proper rate. One end of the tubing is usually placed in one of the brain’s ventricles. The tubing is then tunneled under the skin to another part of the body where the excess CSF can be more easily absorbed as in the abdomen or a chamber in the heart. People who have hydrocephalus usually need a shunt system for the rest of their lives, and regular monitoring is required.