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# Syringomyelia

National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke (NINDS)

## Source

*National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke (NINDS). [Syringomyelia Information Page](#).*

Syringomyelia (sear-IN-go-my-EEL-ya) is a disorder in which a fluid-filled cyst forms within the spinal cord. This cyst, called a syrinx, expands and elongates over time, damaging the spinal cord. Since the spinal cord connects the brain to nerves in the extremities, this damage may cause pain, weakness, and stiffness in the back, shoulders, arms, or legs. Symptoms vary among individuals. Other symptoms may include headaches and a loss of the ability to feel extremes of hot or cold, especially in the hands. Signs of the disorder tend to develop slowly, although sudden onset may occur with coughing or straining. If not treated surgically, syringomyelia often leads to progressive weakness in the arms and legs, loss of hand sensation, and chronic, severe pain. In most cases, the disorder is related to a congenital abnormality of the brain called a Chiari malformation, which causes brain tissue to protrude from its normal location in the back of the head and into the cervical or neck portion of the spinal canal. Syringomyelia may also occur as a complication of trauma, inflammation, spinal cord injury, hemorrhage, spinal cord tumors, or other conditions. Symptoms may appear months or even years after the initial injury, starting with pain, weakness, and sensory impairment originating at the site of trauma. Some cases of syringomyelia are familial, although this is rare.