Arachnoid Cysts

National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke (NINDS)

Source

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Arachnoid cysts are cerebrospinal fluid-filled sacs that are located between the brain or spinal cord and the arachnoid membrane, one of the three membranes that cover the brain and spinal cord. **Primary arachnoid cysts** are present at birth and are the result of developmental abnormalities in the brain and spinal cord that arise during the early weeks of gestation. **Secondary arachnoid cysts** are not as common as primary cysts and develop as a result of head injury, meningitis, or tumors, or as a complication of brain surgery. The majority of arachnoid cysts form outside the temporal lobe of the brain in an area of the skull known as the *middle cranial fossa*. Arachnoid cysts involving the spinal cord are rarer. The location and size of the cyst determine the symptoms and when those symptoms begin. Most individuals with arachnoid cysts develop symptoms before the age of 20, and especially during the first year of life, but some people with arachnoid cysts never have symptoms. Males are four times more likely to have arachnoid cysts than females.

Typical symptoms of an arachnoid cyst around the brain include headache, nausea and vomiting, seizures, hearing and visual disturbances, vertigo, and difficulties with balance and walking. Arachnoid cysts around the spinal cord compress the spinal cord or nerve roots and cause symptoms such as progressive back and leg pain and tingling or numbness in the legs or arms. Diagnosis usually involves a brain scan or spine scan using diffusion-weighted MRI (magnetic resonance imaging) which helps distinguish fluid-filled arachnoid cysts from other types of cysts.