



## Neurological Implications of Spina Bifida Occulta

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### Description

Spina bifida occulta is a type of birth defect that affects the development of the spine and spinal cord. It is considered a form of neural tube defect, which refers to abnormalities in the structure that gives rise to the brain, spinal cord and surrounding tissues in a developing embryo. The term "spina" is Latin for "spine," "bifida" is Latin for "split," and "occulta" is Latin for "hidden," as the defect in spina bifida occulta is not visible, unlike in open spina bifida.

While spina bifida occulta may not be apparent at birth, it can be detected incidentally during radiographic imaging for unrelated conditions or routine physical examinations. X-rays, Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) and Computed Tomography (CT) scans are commonly used imaging tests to detect spina bifida occulta. Physical examination may also reveal small dimples, tufts of hair, or birthmarks on the skin overlying the spine, which can be indications of the condition.

In most cases, spina bifida occulta does not cause symptoms and does not require treatment. The impact on the body is usually mild and it rarely causes symptoms that affect movement during childhood, unlike other forms of spina bifida. However, approximately one in every 1,000 people with spina bifida occulta may experience symptoms as their spinal cord stretches, which could occur during adolescence after a growth spurt. These symptoms may include radiating pain into one or both legs, leg weakness, numbness or changes in leg or back sensation, difficulties with balance, alterations in bowel or bladder function, scoliosis, or foot alignment abnormalities.

The symptoms of spina bifida occulta, particularly those related to a tethered spinal cord, may be indicative of potential neurologic issues. A tethered spinal cord occurs when the spinal cord becomes stretched and may result in a variety of symptoms due to nerve compression. It is important to monitor and address these symptoms promptly to prevent long-term complications.

The treatment for spina bifida occulta aims to relieve symptoms by reducing tension in the spinal cord. This may involve surgical intervention to release the tethered cord and alleviate pressure on the nerves. Physical therapy and occupational therapy may also be recommended to improve muscle strength, coordination and bladder or bowel function. Regular monitoring and follow-up with healthcare professionals are essential to ensure that the condition does not cause any neurological complications.

It is worth noting that spina bifida occulta is a relatively common condition, with an estimated prevalence of up to 20% of the general population. However, not all cases of spina bifida occulta will cause symptoms or require treatment. Many individuals with spina bifida occulta lead healthy and active lives without experiencing any significant neurological issues. However, it is important to have any detected cases of spina bifida occulta monitored by a healthcare professional to ensure that potential complications are identified and managed promptly.

Its potential impact on neurological function, spina bifida occulta may also be associated with other physical manifestations. Physical examination may reveal small dimples, tufts of hair, or birthmarks on the skin overlying the spine, which can be indicative of the condition. These external signs may not necessarily cause any symptoms or require treatment but may be used as clues for identifying spina bifida occulta.

### Conclusion

Spina bifida occulta is a type of birth defect that affects the development of the spine and spinal cord. While it may not cause symptoms in most cases, it can result in neurological complications, particularly if a tethered spinal cord is present. Prompt identification and management of symptoms are important in preventing long-term complications. Regular monitoring and follow-up with healthcare professionals are important for individuals with spina bifida occulta to ensure early detection and management of potential neurological complications. While spina bifida occulta is typically a mild condition that may not cause noticeable symptoms, it can sometimes lead to a tethered spinal cord, where the spinal cord becomes stretched and can result in various neurological symptoms.

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