



# About Syringomyelia

## DEFINITION

Syringomyelia (seer-in-go-my-EEL-ya) occurs when a cavity, or syrinx, is formed inside the spinal cord from a build-up of fluid, which results from a blockage, either from a Chiari malformation (CM), spinal trauma, tumor, or other cause. Syringomyelia (SM) can cause stretching and, eventually, permanent injury to nerve fibers.

## CAUSES

Often, SM is associated with CM. There is at least a partial blockage of normal cerebrospinal fluid (CSF) circulation in almost all cases of SM.

Obstruction of CSF flow is most commonly caused:

- by abnormalities in the base of the skull (CM) or in the spine
- from scar tissue after spinal injuries, spinal infections or spinal surgery
- arachnoid partitions (arachnoid cysts) which may be present from birth
- the presence of some tumors in the spinal cord

## TREATMENT

Currently, the only effective treatment is surgery.

Aim of surgery: Decrease the size of the syrinx and relieve the symptoms of treating the cause of the syrinx: Chiari, tumor, etc. Occasionally, direct drainage of the syrinx is needed.

## DIAGNOSTIC TESTS

MRI will indicate whether or not a patient has SM or any other abnormality. A "screening" MRI of the spine can establish a diagnosis of SM.

Three components for appropriate diagnosis and treatment of SM:

- patient's history of specific characteristic symptoms
- examination that shows signs consistent with SM
- head and spine MRI demonstrating characteristic anatomy of SM

**COMMON SIGNS & SYMPTOMS**

- Numbness
- Tingling
- Pain\*
- Weakness\*

\*these symptoms occur particularly in the arms and legs

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