



Tethered Spinal Cord Symptoms

A tethered spinal cord happens when the spinal cord is tied down or stuck to the inside of the spinal canal. This makes the spinal cord stretch and causes problems.

To Learn More

- Neurodevelopmental / Birth Defects
206-987-2210
- Ask your child's healthcare provider
- www.seattlechildrens.org

Free Interpreter Services

- In the hospital, ask your child's nurse.
- From outside the hospital, call the toll-free Family Interpreting Line 1-866-583-1527. Tell the interpreter the name or extension you need.
- For Deaf and hard of hearing callers
206-987-2280 (TTY)

What is a tethered spinal cord?

A tethered spinal cord is a condition where the spinal cord gets pulled down and fixed (tethered) to the spinal canal. Most often, this happens as a result of a surgery on the spine. Scarring can develop at any time after a meningomyelocele or operation on lipomyelomeningoceles (lipomas of the cord). "Tethered cord" is simply the name for scarring at the repair site.

The spinal cord normally floats inside the spinal canal. As a child grows, the cord must be able to move freely inside the canal. Instead, if it's tied down or stuck due to scar tissue, it stretches (like a rubber band pulled too tight). As your child grows, nerves may become damaged and symptoms start to develop.

Symptoms of nerve damage may include:

- Back pain and shooting pain in the legs
- Weakness, numbness or problems with muscle function in the legs
- Tremors or spasms in the leg muscles
- Changes in bladder and/or bowel control
- Scoliosis or curvature of the spine that changes or gets worse

When should I call the doctor?

If your child has any of these symptoms, call the Neurodevelopmental Clinic at 206-987-2210. Your child needs to be examined right away.

Seattle Children's offers interpreter services for Deaf, hard of hearing or non-English speaking patients, family members and legal representatives free of charge. Seattle Children's will make this information available in alternate formats upon request. Call the Family Resource Center at 206-987-2201.

This handout has been reviewed by clinical staff at Seattle Children's. However, your child's needs are unique. Before you act or rely upon this information, please talk with your child's healthcare provider.

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