

Shunt Malfunction: Signs and Symptoms

A shunt malfunction means that your child's shunt is not working properly. You may notice one or more of these signs and symptoms during a shunt malfunction:

An infant may

- Have unexplained crabbiness.
- Throw up or not eat normally.
- Have a bulging or a rounded soft spot, even when not crying.
- Sleep more than normal.
- Have swelling around the shunt site or shunt tubing.
- Have an increase in head size.
- Be unable to look straight ahead and only look down.

A toddler may

- Have changes in mood, personality or behavior.
- Throw up or not eat as well as normal.
- Have a headache. Look for pain behaviors if your child is not able to tell you they have a headache.
- Sleep more than normal.
- Have swelling around the shunt site or shunt tubing.

A school age child may

- Throw up or not eat as well as normal.
- Have a headache or vision changes.
- Sleep more than normal.
- Have a hard time thinking or understanding.
- Have changes in mood, personality or behavior.
- Have lower grades in school.
- Have swelling around the shunt site or shunt tubing.



Signs and symptoms of a shunt infection

Your child is at risk of shunt infection for up to six months after surgery. Most often, if there is an infection, it will occur within the first weeks after surgery. Please call the neurosurgery office if you think your child may have a shunt infection.

Symptoms of shunt infection may include:

- Fever 101°F (38.3°C) or higher.
- Redness, drainage or increased swelling around incision(s).
- A headache that gets worse.

ALERT: Call your child's neurosurgery office if you have any questions or concerns, or if your child has:

- A seizure.
- Signs that the shunt is not working as it should
- Signs of an infection.
- Special health care needs that were not covered by this information.

This teaching sheet is meant to help you care for your child. It does not take the place of medical care. Talk with your healthcare provider for diagnosis, treatment, and follow-up.