Microcephaly

What Is Microcephaly?

Microcephaly is a neurological condition that occurs when an infant's brain doesn't develop properly, causing a baby's head to be small.

Microcephaly can happen to a baby while in the womb or within the first few years of life. Most children who have microcephaly experience cognitive delays and other neurological problems.

What Causes Microcephaly?

In most cases of microcephaly, the cause is unknown. Sometimes the cause is genetic and sometimes there is no family history of the condition. In other cases, microcephaly is the result of the following during pregnancy:

- An infection of the **Zika virus**.

- An infection such as rubella, toxoplasmosis, or cytomegalovirus.

- A lack of nutrients or food.

- Exposure to toxic or harmful substances, such as alcohol, drugs, or chemicals.

- Interruption of the blood supply to the baby's brain during development.

Microcephaly Symptoms and Effects

In addition to small head size, severe or mild microcephaly symptoms can include:

- Speech delays or delays standing or walking.

- Learning delays or other intellectual disability.

- **Cerebral palsy.**

- **Seizures.**

- Coordination or movement problems.

- Hearing loss.

- Vision loss.

- Short height.

In most cases, the effects of microcephaly are permanent and last a lifetime. In rare cases, severe microcephaly can be life threatening. However, some babies and children experience no symptoms beyond small head size.

Microcephaly Diagnosis and Treatment

In most cases, microcephaly is present before or at birth. An obstetrician might be able to diagnose congenital microcephaly using a prenatal ultrasound.

When symptoms of microcephaly appear later in infancy or childhood, **neurologists** at Gillette Children's might diagnose it by reviewing your child's medical history, performing a physical exam, and discussing with other specialists.

Additional tests used to diagnose microcephaly might include:

- Measuring the circumference of your child's head.
- Measuring the circumference of the parents' heads to determine if small head size runs in the family.
- **CT scan** of the head.
- **MRI scan** of the head.
- Lab tests for evidence of past infection or possible genetic causes.

It's difficult to predict at birth what lifelong issues microcephaly will cause. That's why babies and children who have microcephaly often need regular checkups with a health care provider.

There's no cure for microcephaly. However, many symptoms of the condition can be managed with routine care, monitoring and therapies. At Gillette, we focus on developing your child's abilities and encouraging their independence.

If your child has microcephaly, necessary treatments might include:

- Medication to control **seizures**, hyperactivity or other neuromuscular problems.
- **Speech therapy.**
- **Physical therapy.**
- **Occupational therapy.**

Integrated Care

Treatment for the complex symptoms and effects of microcephaly require a team of specialists. At Gillette, your family will work with experts in a wide range of specialties and services that might include:

- **Medical genetics and genetic counseling.**
- **Neurology.**
- **Neuropsychology.**
- **Psychology.**

- **Radiology and imaging.**

- **Rehabilitation medicine.**

- **Child life.**

- **Social work.**

Our multidisciplinary team of experts is here to support your family, answer questions, and help your child feel their best every step of the way.

Appointment: 651-290-8707

Refer a Patient: 651-325-2200

Pediatric Expert Consult (https://www.gillettechildrens.org/conditions-care/pediatric-expert-consult)

More Ways to Contact Us (https://www.gillettechildrens.orghttps://www.gillettechildrens.org/contact-us)