



Information for You from Your Health Care Team

What is a ventriculostomy? (ven-trik-u-los-to-me)

A soft tube placed by a doctor through the top of the head. You may hear the ventriculostomy called a "ventric." This tube travels through a hole in the skull, into of an area of the brain called a ventricle. This tube is connected to a longer tube, and to a drainage bag and a monitor.



What does a ventriculostomy do?

A ventriculostomy is a tool to measure the pressure in your head called intracranial pressure, or ICP. It is important for the doctors and nurses to know your pressures for many reasons. This useful tool can help to manage your care in a few ways:

- Sometimes the ventriculostomy is placed only to measure your pressures.
- It is also used to drain out extra cerebrospinal fluid, or CSF. When CSF is drained it flows through the tube, into a bag. Draining the extra fluid will bring your pressures down.
- It can also be used to drain blood from your head, if you have had a bleed in your brain. Getting rid of the blood helps in your recovery, as your brain does not like blood in the cerebrospinal fluid. When the blood is gone, your symptoms like headache, neck pain or stiffness, or light sensitivity get better. This may take several days.

What are some reasons patients get ventriculostomies?

- After brain surgery
- Malformations in your brain vessels
- Head injury
- Brain aneurysms
- Hydrocephalus, or too much CSF

How is the ventriculostomy placed?

This is a procedure that usually takes less than an hour. Sometimes, the doctor will place the drain during surgery. Most of the time, the doctor places it right while you are in your bed. Here is a brief description of the steps:

- Your nurse and doctor will work together to make sure you are comfortable by giving pain medicine and some mild sedation.
- You will have a small part of your head shaved.
- You will have a drape placed over your head to keep the area sterile and clean.
- The doctor will numb the top of your head with lidocaine, which is similar to novocaine, like you get at the dentist.
- The doctor will drill a hole into the top of your skull and place the tube inside the ventricle.
- The tube is held in place with a few stitches and a dressing.
- The tube should not hurt while it is in your head.

What can I expect when I have the ventriculostomy in?

- Your nurse will be checking your drain often, at least every hour. The nurse is checking your pressure, draining off your extra CSF, checking your dressing for leaking, and making sure it is in the right position.
- Your doctor will take samples of the fluid from the drain to help manage your care. It is sent to the lab and tested, just like when blood samples are sent.
- You will need an antibiotic through your IV the entire time you have your ventriculostomy. This is to prevent infection.

What do I need to know while I have a ventriculostomy?

- **It is very important that you never move the head of your bed up or down without help from your nurse while your drain is in.** Your nurse needs to check the level of the drain and make sure you do not drain too much fluid by closing the drain with movement. **Always ask for help.** Please ask if you have any questions or pain.
- When your drain is taken out, it does not hurt. There is mild discomfort, just like when you get stitches out. A dressing is placed for at least 24 hours, and the nurse and doctor will check for drainage. Infection is something that will be watched for closely.
- Your nurse and doctor will talk to you about your ventriculostomy. It is important to ask questions and voice concerns or fears you may have about your drain. This will help you and your family better understand why you need the ventriculostomy, and put your mind at ease. Feel confident in knowing that your drain is being watched closely, and your health care team will attend to any problems that you may have.

Speak Up if You Have Any Questions or Concerns