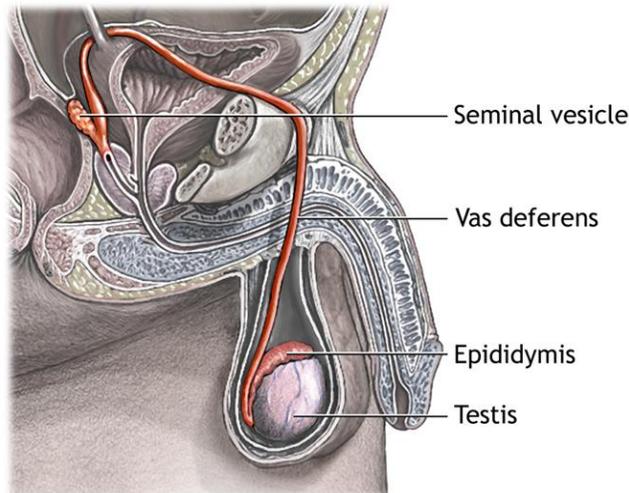


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Hydrocele (Adult)

Definition

A **hydrocele** is a fluid-filled sac in the **scrotum**. The scrotum is the sac that surrounds the **testicles** (the organs that produce sperm). A hydrocele may be present at birth or may develop in adulthood.



Cause

During development, testicles form inside the fetus' abdominal cavity. Shortly before birth, muscles in the abdomen open slightly so that the testicles can move outside the body. When the testicles descend into the scrotum, abdominal tissue moves down as well and lines the scrotum. The opening in the muscle closes after the testicles move into the scrotum.

Sometimes, the same area of the muscles that allows the testicles to descend during fetal development can re-open in adulthood. This is called a **hernia** and may be caused by an injury to the scrotum or a strain in the muscles of the groin. When this happens, fluid from the abdomen can leak into the scrotum, causing a hydrocele to form.

At-Risk Groups

Any man can develop a hydrocele. Hydroceles that are not present at birth occur more often

in men over the age of forty. There are many reasons why a hydrocele forms. These reasons include:

- Infection of the scrotum.
- Injury to the groin or scrotum.
- **Hernia** in the groin (hernia occurs when the muscles of the groin weaken and a piece of the intestine slips through the muscle into the scrotum area).
- A blockage of the **lymphatic fluid** in the scrotum (lymphatic fluid circulates throughout the body fighting infection and carrying away toxins).
- Heart failure causing fluid retention in the lower half of the body.
- Cancer of the testicle or scrotum (very rarely).

Symptoms

The main symptom of a hydrocele is swelling of the scrotum. For some men, the swelling may be minor. For others, the scrotum may enlarge several times its normal size. An enlarged scrotum may be painless or slightly uncomfortable. Some men also experience pain in the groin, scrotum, or lower back.

Complications

There are generally few if any complications associated with hydroceles or their treatment. These complications include:

- Enlargement of the scrotum so that wearing clothes is difficult or uncomfortable.
- Reaction to the anesthesia used during surgery.
- Bruising or swelling near the hydrocele site or near the site of surgery.
- Hernia.
- Infertility (very rarely).

Diagnosis

Hydrocele is first diagnosed by a physical examination. Your doctor will examine your scrotum. **Ultrasound** may be performed on the scrotum. An ultrasound uses sound waves to produce images of the inside of your scrotum. The images will show your doctor if a hernia is the cause of your hydrocele.

If the hydrocele is larger or continues to grow, the fluid in the hydrocele may be drained. However, unless the hole that is allowing the fluid to enter the scrotum is closed, the hydrocele will refill with fluid within a few weeks. If you decide to have the fluid drained, your doctor will rub medication on your scrotum to numb the area. A very thin needle is inserted into the hydrocele and the fluid is drained. The fluid may be tested to determine if there are abnormal cells present or if the fluid is infected.

Treatment

Many hydroceles do not require treatment. If the hydrocele is not large or uncomfortable you may decide to leave it alone. Your doctor can examine the hydrocele at your annual physical exam to be sure it has not changed and that you need no further treatment.

The only treatment for hydroceles is a surgery called **hydrocelectomy**. The opening that is allowing the fluid in enter the scrotum must be closed. The surgery is usually done as an outpatient procedure. You will be able to go home after the procedure.

Before surgery, you will be given medication so that you are unconscious during surgery and cannot feel pain. This is called **general anesthesia**. You may also have epidural anesthesia. The medication is injected through a very small tube placed near your lower spine. You will be conscious but your lower body will be numb.

A small incision is made in your scrotum and the fluid is drained. The doctor will examine your testicle to be sure it is healthy. The hole that is allowing the fluid into your scrotum is closed and the skin stitched together.

The surgery usually last 30 minutes, and you will be able to go home shortly afterwards. You will need to have someone drive you home after the surgery. For the first few days following surgery, you will need to limit your activity in order to allow the area to heal.

Prognosis (Expectations)

There are generally few if any complications from hydrocele treatment. You may experience mild pain or discomfort for a few days following surgery.

If you do not need treatment for your hydrocele, you may have not symptoms. Hydroceles usually get smaller when you are lying down. They may become larger and slightly tender if you stand for long periods of time. Lying down for a while may relieve any discomfort.

If a hydrocele is drained, it usually returns quickly. However, following surgical treatment for a hydrocele, it will usually not recur.