

NPH: A Common Disorder Often Overlooked or Misdiagnosed

People who have difficulty walking, memory problems or urinary incontinence – or all three – may not just be suffering from “old age.” They might have a condition that is often treatable: normal pressure hydrocephalus, or NPH.

Unfortunately, NPH often goes undiagnosed or misdiagnosed because its symptoms are similar to more common conditions such as Alzheimer’s or Parkinson’s disease. NPH occurs when excessive cerebral spinal fluid (CSF) accumulates in the brain, enlarging areas called ventricles. This distorts surrounding brain tissue, leading to one or more of the three major symptoms.

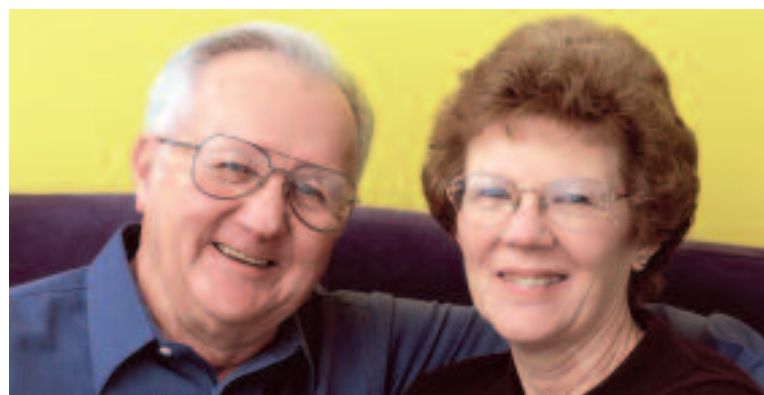
Experts believe as many as 250,000 adults in the United States have NPH. Diagnosis is a complex process best performed by an experienced team. “We have set up an entire program to evaluate the patient most objectively,” says Dr. Laura Paré, a neurosurgeon at University of California, Irvine Medical Center.

UC Irvine doctors evaluate a patient’s personal history, perform a neurological exam and study CT or MRI images of the brain. Next, a three-day lumbar drain, the most effective diagnostic tool, is performed. The procedure involves placing a thin tube in the back to allow CSF to drain from the brain and help return the ventricles to normal size. This can relieve symptoms temporarily.

The only successful treatment for NPH is implanting a shunt – a permanent drainage system that helps reduce or eliminate symptoms. UC Irvine is conducting a clinical trial designed to improve diagnosis and treatment of NPH.

“NPH is one of the few treatable dementias,” Paré says, “and we have the resources to treat it comprehensively.”

To make an appointment with a UC Irvine neurosurgeon, call 714-456-6392.



Breast Cancer Watch: Screenings are Still Important As Time Goes By

Screening for breast cancer becomes increasingly important for women as they grow older. The incidence of the disease nearly doubles for women ages 50 to 54, compared to those 40 to 44 years old. It rises another 34 percent for women ages 60 to 64 and again 23 percent for women 70 to 74.

The American Cancer Society strongly recommends annual screenings beginning at age 40. If you are 50 years or older, it is critical to have regular screenings.

As women reach their late 70s and 80s, screenings remain important, says University of California, Irvine Medical Center radiologist Dr. Stephen Feig, “because older women in generally good health still have substantial life expectancy. Our guideline on screenings at that age is to base it on each individual’s health.”

The most advanced screening methods are available at UC Irvine Medical Center, and even newer technology is on the way: breast ultrasound, digital mammography and breast MRI, which is especially helpful in assisting doctors to detect cancers in dense breast tissue or those missed by conventional mammography .

For those diagnosed with breast cancer, there are a multitude of treatments, and chances for surviving the disease have never been better. The UCI Breast Health Center offers a complete range of advanced treatments, including breast-conserving options and pioneering drug therapies.

Says Feig: “Women have one of the best breast care centers in the country available right here.”

To make an appointment with a breast health specialist, call toll free 1-877-UCI-DOCS (824-3627).