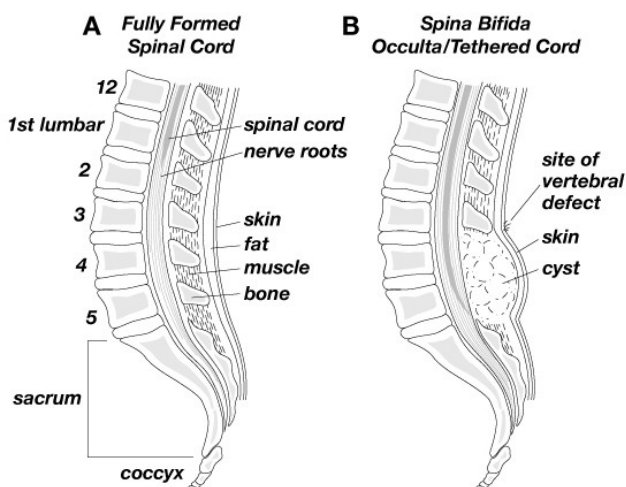


## Tethered Cord

A tethered cord is when the spinal cord cannot move freely in the spinal column. When the child bends and moves, the spinal cord is stretched. This stretching may cause:

- Loss or change in bladder or bowel control.
- Pain, numbness or tingling in the back, legs or feet.
- Scoliosis getting worse (abnormal curving of the spine).

Symptoms may get worse over time and can happen at any time during childhood or as an adult.



### Causes

Some spinal cord problems that are present at birth may cause the cord to be fused to the tissue around it. These problems cannot always be seen when looking at the child. Often there are clues found in the skin lying over the spine. You may notice a:

- Tuft of hair
- Tiny hole
- Skin tag
- Mass under the skin

It could also be caused by built up scar tissue in the spine from a past surgery.

### Treatment

Patients need surgery to prevent further nerve damage. Surgery involves gently releasing the spinal cord from the surrounding tissue.

### Before Surgery

You will need to have a physical exam and lab tests. Complete this within 30 days of surgery or we may need to cancel the surgery.

Contact your insurance company for any referrals you may need.

**Stop** the medicines listed for two weeks before surgery:

- Aspirin, Excedrin<sup>®</sup>, Ascriptin<sup>®</sup>, and Ecotrin<sup>®</sup>
- Vitamins and herbal supplements
- Ibuprofen, Advil<sup>®</sup>, Motrin<sup>®</sup>, Nuprin<sup>®</sup>, and Aleve<sup>®</sup>

Please call our office to discuss instructions if you take:

- Plavix<sup>®</sup>
- Coumadin<sup>®</sup> or Warfarin

You may use acetaminophen (Tylenol<sup>®</sup>) for pain if needed.

**No** smoking or exposure to cigarette smoke for two weeks before surgery.

We will call the afternoon before surgery. You will be told what time you need to arrive at the hospital and final details about getting ready for surgery.

**Do not** wear make-up, jewelry, or nail polish the day of surgery.

### **After Surgery**

Plan for at least 2 to 5 days in the hospital. You will need to lay flat for **24 hours** to reduce the chance of cerebral spinal fluid leaking from the incision.

Muscle spasms or pain are common after surgery. Pain medicine will be given to help.

**Keep the dressing clean and dry.** Check the incision for infection twice a day until it is healed. Signs of infection include:

- Fever above 101.5° F
- Redness, swelling, or drainage from the incision

**Avoid** twisting, pulling, stretching or straining the back until you are told it is okay.

### **Follow Up**

You will have a follow-up visit scheduled in the Neurosurgery Clinic in 7-10 days. The back dressing and stitches will be removed at that time.

### **When to Call**

Call if you have **any** questions about the surgery. If the incision becomes infected, call right away.

### **Who to Call**

Pediatric Neurosurgery Clinic  
American Family Children's Hospital

**(608) 263-6420 or 1-800-323-8942**

After hours, weekends, and holidays, call the paging operator at **(608) 262-0486**. Ask for the neurosurgeon on call. Give your name and phone number with the area code. The doctor will call you back.

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person's health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright © 2/2025. University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing. HF#5335