

# Your child's shunt: Frequently Asked Questions

## How long will the shunt last?

This can vary greatly between children. About 40% of shunts will need to be changed within the first year, and about 80% will need to be changed within 10 years. Some shunts will need several changes. Your child's Neurosurgeon can give you more information.

## At what age should the shunt tubing be extended?

Generally, tubing does not need to be extended as there is enough tubing length to allow for your child's growth.

## Will my child have the same symptoms every time the shunt doesn't work properly?

Your child may have a range of symptoms if there is a problem with the shunt. It is important to know the signs that the shunt may not be working properly.

You should bring your child into the Women's and Children's Hospital Emergency Department if you are concerned your child's shunt is not working properly. If you are in a rural or remote area, take your child to the nearest emergency department.

**In an emergency call 000 for an ambulance.**

## Will my child be slow in reaching milestones or have learning difficulties?

Children develop at different stages. Speak to your local doctor (GP) if you are concerned about your child's development.

## Should my child avoid certain types of food or drink?

Your child can eat and drink as normal.

## Can my child fly on a plane with a shunt?

There should be no restrictions on travel, but check with your Neurosurgeon before flying for the first time after the shunt is inserted. Your child will be able to pass through security detectors and travel on planes as normal.

## Will my child's shunt set off alarms in airports or shops?

Your child's shunt will not set off alarms in airports or shops.

## What should I tell my family and friends about my child's shunt?

It is important that all caregivers are aware that your child has a shunt and know the signs that a shunt may not be working properly. You can give your friends and family a factsheet to help them better understand your child's shunt.

## Can my child play sports?

Children with shunts ideally should avoid contact sports, such as football or rugby, which may cause injury to the shunt valve or a head injury. Encourage your child to play low impact sports.

A helmet should be worn for bike riding or other sports that may cause head injury.



## If my child gets hit on the head can it damage the shunt, what should I do?

A hit on the head may be a concern, even though it is unlikely to damage the shunt. If your child gets hit on the head and you are concerned call the Women's and Children's Hospital or seek medical advice. If your child's behaviour changes or they show any signs that the shunt may not be working properly seek urgent medical attention

## Does my child's position make a difference to how the shunt works, for example bending over or doing handstands?

No, your child's position does not make a difference to how the shunt works.

## What is Slit Ventricle Syndrome?

This condition occurs rarely, and only in children or adults that have had a shunt for many years. Over time the ventricle walls become stiff and unable to fill properly. On a CT or MRI scan the ventricles look thin like slits.

Signs of Slit Ventricle Syndrome include headache, vomiting and drowsiness.

**If this happens you need to bring your child into the Women's and Children's Hospital Emergency Department. If you are in a rural or remote area, take your child to the nearest emergency department.**

## What is normal for a child with a shunt? (Sleep patterns, headaches etc.)

Your child should be treated the same as any child of the same age with sleeping and positioning, and safe sleeping guidelines should be followed. Each child has their own normal sleep routine. If your child is sleepier than usual or very unsettled, it may be a sign that the shunt is not working properly.

**If your child is showing any signs that the shunt may not be working including anything more than a mild headache, bring your child into the Women's and Children's Hospital Emergency Department. If you are in a rural or remote area, take your child to the nearest emergency department.**

**In an emergency call 000 for an ambulance.**

## Are there support groups in the area?

The Women's and Children's Hospital is setting up a support group in late 2014. Visit the Women's and Children's Hospital website for more details:

<http://www.wch.sa.gov.au/services/az/divisions/psurg/neuro/index.html>

## Other useful factsheets

- Your child and hydrocephalus
- Your child's shunt: General information
- Your child's shunt: Everyday living for my baby/toddler
- Your child's shunt: Everyday living for my child/teen

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## For more information

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