



What is Spina Bifida?

-A parent handout-

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- Spina Bifida, formally known as a Myelodysplasia, is a birth defect that occurs when the the spine (consisting of the spinal column and spinal cord) does not form or properly during pregnancy. Often leaving an opening that fluid or the spinal cord get pushed through as the baby is developing.

What are the three most common types of Spina Bifida?

- **Myelomeningocele** is the most common form of Spina Bifida. It is categorized by a bulge of the spinal meninges (protective layer around the spinal cord) and the spinal cord coming out of the spine. Level of severity can vary, depending on how much and where on the spine the spinal cord comes out.
- **Meningocele and Spina Bifida Occulta** are not as severe, as they do not involve the spinal cord bulging out. They are categorized by an opening in the spinal column that may be covered with skin or have a sack of fluid coming out of the spine.

What might I see with Spina Bifida?

- Muscle weakness (often in the legs, but may also involve the arms)
- Sensory deficits (abnormal interpretation of pain, touch, proprioception, and temperature)
- Musculoskeletal deformities: Spinal abnormalities, lower limb deformities, leg length discrepancies, club foot, hip dysplasia
- Bowel and bladder issues
- Seizures
- Hydrocephalus (fluid buildup in the brain)
- Spasticity (an increase in muscle resistance to sudden, passive movement)

What is the treatment for Spina Bifida?

- Surgical repair within the womb or within the first few days following birth
- Monitoring by a team of specialists depending on level of severity
- Therapeutic intervention from physical therapists and occupational therapists
- Equipment needs assessment and management

What can physical therapy address for my child with Spina Bifida?

- Gain and maintain mobility
- Motor skill acquisition; Adaption of motor skills with and without use of adaptive equipment
- Prevention of secondary impairments (joint contractures and wounds)
- Equipment and assistive device assessment and management
- Assistance with management of orthotics
- Strength, balance, and range of motion (joint and muscle flexibility)

Questions?

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