

# BRANCHIAL CLEFT CYST

## △ GENERAL INFORMATION

*Branchial cleft cyst* is a condition that has its beginning when the neck of the tiny embryo begins to take shape in the mother's womb. During this time of development, several deep grooves (*branchial clefts*) in the neck don't disappear as they should. As a result, a thin tube of tissue not much thicker than spaghetti remains under the skin of the neck. This tube usually runs from the middle or lower part of the neck upward and inward toward the throat on the side of the neck. Branchial cleft cyst is most commonly seen in children and young adults.

## COMMON SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Often, this tube does not cause a problem. At other times, it drains clear fluid to the outside through an opening in the skin, usually at the lower part of the side of the neck.
- Sometimes, the tube does not have an outside opening, and the fluid accumulates in the tube to create the swelling (a *cyst*) (Fig. 1).
- The cyst can be the size of a small olive or as large as a chicken egg.
- Most of the time, the cyst is not painful. However, if the fluid inside it becomes infected, it can be very painful.



**Figure 1.** Most often the branchial cleft cyst is found in the location shown. However, it can be anywhere along a line from the bottom of the ear to the breast bone.

## DIAGNOSIS

- Usually the diagnosis can be made by taking a detailed history and doing a careful physical examination. If there are questions about the diagnosis, ultrasound can help clear up any doubts.
- Ultrasound: Harmless sound waves are aimed at the area of your neck. The sound waves bouncing back (the echoes) from this area are seen as a picture on a screen. Ultrasound is a convenient, painless, and harmless way to examine organs and tissues inside the neck. It is especially useful to determine whether the "mass" is solid or filled with fluid.

## ○ TREATMENT

The appropriate treatment for a branchial cleft cyst or sinus is an operation to remove it. After consideration of all factors, the recommendation is that you have an operation to remove the branchial cleft cyst.

## POSTOPERATIVE CARE

- You will be taken to a recovery room and observed. When your blood pressure, pulse, and breathing are stable and you are completely alert, you may be able to go home that same day with a responsible adult. Otherwise, you will be taken to a regular hospital room.
- There will be a small bandage over the incision.
- Pain will be controlled with medicine.
- Your diet will be as you tolerate it.
- As with any operation, complications are always possible. Although they are uncommon with this type of operation, they can include bleeding, infection, temporary hoarseness, and possibly others.
- Arrangements will be made for your medicine, follow-up office visit, and stitch removal.

#### ✚ HOME CARE

- Resume your usual activities.
- You may walk about as you wish, even climb stairs.
- You may eat as you did before the operation.
- Take medicine as prescribed for your pain.
- You may shower if you wish and with any dressings on or off.
  - There may be narrow strips of tape across the incision. It's all right if they get wet; they will be removed in the doctor's office.
  - After you dry yourself, replace any dressings with clean, dry ones.

- You may drive a car if you wish but not if you are taking any medicines that reduce your alertness.
- You may return to work when you feel up to it.

#### CALL OUR OFFICE IF

- You develop any unusual signs or symptoms.
- The incision becomes red or swollen, or there is drainage from it.
- You develop a temperature higher than 100°F.
- You have any questions.