

# Idiopathic Intracranial Hypertension

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This material will help you understand idiopathic intracranial hypertension and how it is treated.

## **What is idiopathic intracranial hypertension?**

Idiopathic intracranial hypertension (IIH, also known as pseudotumor cerebri) is a condition in which the pressure in your head is elevated. The term “idiopathic” means that it occurs for unclear reasons, “intracranial” means inside the head, and “hypertension” means high pressure. The high pressure is caused by a buildup of cerebrospinal fluid (CSF). CSF is a clear liquid that coats your brain and spinal cord. The high pressure can cause headache or vision problems.

## **What causes idiopathic intracranial hypertension?**

The cause of IIH is unknown. Anyone can develop this condition, but young women who are overweight or obese are affected the most. Doctors think that hormone variations, certain medicines, and high doses of vitamin A could all increase pressure in the head.

## **How is idiopathic intracranial hypertension diagnosed?**

The symptoms of IIH are similar to many other conditions. Your eye doctor will perform a complete exam of your eye and may check your visual field. If there are signs on your exam that you might have IIH, then you will need to have a picture taken of your head

with a CT or MRI. This is performed to check for tumors, blood clots, or other abnormalities in the head. If that is normal, then your doctor will order a lumbar puncture (also known as a spinal tap) to check the CSF pressure and make sure the CSF is normal. Patients with IIH have normal head imaging and normal CSF, but elevated CSF pressure.

### **How is idiopathic intracranial hypertension treated?**

Sometimes the symptoms of IIH can disappear without treatment. If you do not have vision loss or serious headaches, you may not need treatment. If you are experiencing these problems, your doctor may prescribe medicine. The goal of using medicine is to lower the pressure in the head. This will help protect your vision from the elevated pressure. Your doctor may also recommend that you have a procedure to protect your vision from the high pressure. Many people continue to have headaches despite using medicine. Weight loss is also a good treatment option for patients who are overweight.

**For more information, scan these codes with your smartphone or visit the websites listed.**



<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/article/000351.htm>

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