

Cavernous Angioma

A cavernous angioma (cavernoma) is a vascular abnormality found within the central nervous system. They are a group of dilated blood vessels and range from red to purple in colour. Often there are areas of haemorrhage around the cavernoma.



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CAUSE

Cavernoma occur equally between both sexes and all races. Some people have a tendency to form multiple cavernoma or have a family history of this malformation. It is possible there could be a genetic link to the formation of cavernomas. They can occur in any part of the brain and be of various sizes.

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

These are most commonly discovered incidentally when a head CT or MRI scan is performed for some other reason. Other times cavernomas may be discovered when they cause neurological symptoms which depend on the location and size. These can include:

- Seizures.
- Headaches.
- Double vision.
- Progressive or transient weakness or change in feeling of arms or legs.

Up to a quarter of patients will present with a bleed from the cavernoma into the surrounding brain.

This usually causes a sudden and severe headache often associated with nausea and vomiting. Rarely a patient may develop weakness in their arms or legs and become drowsy. A bleed may be very small and cause mild or no symptoms. The risk of haemorrhage from the cavernoma will depend on the location of the cavernoma and should be discussed with your neurosurgeon.

INVESTIGATIONS

A number of tests are performed in the diagnosis of a cavernoma.

Radiological tests

- CT head – this may demonstrate the cavernoma or whether there has been a haemorrhage.
- MRI – this is the most useful investigation to a cavernoma and is very sensitive as to whether there has been a bleed into the surrounding brain.

TREATMENT

The two main possible treatment options are:

- Surgery.
- No treatment.