



Small Head Size May Increase Risk of Cerebral Palsy

NEW GUIDELINES DEVELOPED BY THE AMERICAN ACADEMY OF NEUROLOGY AND THE CHILD NEUROLOGY SOCIETY SUGGEST THAT INFANTS WITH SMALLER THAN NORMAL HEAD SIZE BE SCREENED FOR NEUROLOGICAL AND COGNITIVE PROBLEMS, INCLUDING CEREBRAL PALSY.

THE CONDITION, CALLED MICROENCEPHALY, IS DEFINED AS A HEAD CIRCUMFERENCE THAT IS SMALLER THAN THAT OF 97% OF CHILDREN. MICROENCEPHALY IS IDENTIFIED IN ABOUT 25,000 CHILDREN PER YEAR, USUALLY INFANTS AND TODDLERS UP TO THE AGE OF 2, THOUGH IT CAN BE DIAGNOSED LATER.

APPROXIMATELY 20% OF CHILDREN WITH MICROENCEPHALY ALSO HAVE CEREBRAL PALSY, WHILE OTHERS HAVE MENTAL RETARDATION, EPILEPSY, LEARNING DISABILITIES, AND OTHER NEUROLOGICAL AND COGNITIVE PROBLEMS.

THE GUIDELINES, WHICH APPEAR IN THE SEPTEMBER 15 ISSUE OF *Neurology*, THE MEDICAL JOURNAL OF THE AMERICAN ACADEMY OF NEUROLOGY, URGE ALL DOCTORS TO BECOME FAMILIAR WITH MICROENCEPHALY SO AT-RISK CHILDREN CAN BE SCREENED NOT ONLY FOR THE CONDITION, BUT ALSO FOR OTHER CONDITIONS—SUCH AS CEREBRAL PALSY—THAT ARE ASSOCIATED WITH MICROENCEPHALY.

EARLY DIAGNOSIS OF CEREBRAL PALSY IS EXTREMELY IMPORTANT, AS EARLY INTERVENTION CAN SIGNIFICANTLY IMPROVE THE LONG-TERM PROGNOSIS. THE EARLIER A CHILD IS DIAGNOSED WITH CEREBRAL PALSY, THE EARLIER HE CAN RECEIVE THE TREATMENT, SUPPORT, AND BENEFITS HE NEEDS AND DESERVES.

WHILE MANY CHILDREN WITH SMALLER THAN NORMAL HEAD SIZE WILL GO ON TO EXPERIENCE NORMAL DEVELOPMENT WITHOUT RELATED CONDITIONS OR PROBLEMS, IT'S IMPORTANT THAT DOCTORS TEST FOR RELATED CONDITIONS SUCH AS CEREBRAL PALSY AS SOON AS POSSIBLE. MICROENCEPHALY AND ITS POSSIBLE CAUSES CAN BE DIAGNOSED USING BRAIN SCANS SUCH AS THE MRI AND CT SCAN, AS WELL AS GENETIC TESTING.