



What is pseudotumor cerebri?

Pseudotumor cerebri (PTC) is a condition where pressure inside your head rises, causing vision problems, headaches and other symptoms. This happens when fluid from the brain (called cerebrospinal fluid, or CSF) does not flow out of the head as it should.

Eye Words to Know

Cerebrospinal fluid (CSF): Clear fluid that bathes and protects the brain and spinal cord.

Optic disc: The structure around the optic nerve where it enters the back of your eye; it can be seen by an ophthalmologist during an eye exam.

Optic nerve: A nerve at the back of your eye that connects to your brain. It sends light signals to your brain so you can see.

When pressure around the brain is too high it can put pressure on the optic nerve causing it to swell. This may eventually damage the optic nerve, often causing vision loss. High pressure can also damage the nerves that move the eyes, causing double vision.

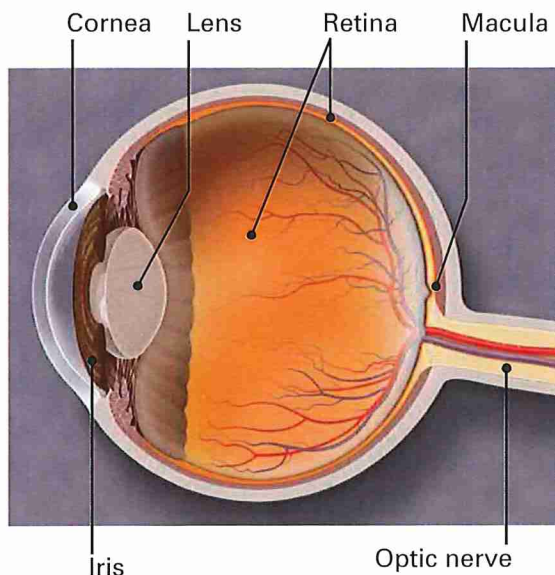
What causes pseudotumor cerebri?

Doctors do not know for sure what causes pseudotumor cerebri. However, they suspect hormones play a role since this condition is more common in young, overweight women.

Sometimes children and adults who are not overweight have PTC. These cases may be related to infection, or to using antibiotics, steroids or high doses of vitamin A.

What is "pseudotumor"?

The term "pseudotumor" means "false tumor." The condition pseudotumor cerebri is called this because its symptoms mimic a brain tumor.



What are symptoms of pseudotumor cerebri?

- **Headaches, often at the back of your neck.** These headaches may be so severe that they wake you up at night. Your headaches may be worse when you stoop or bend down.
- **Vision changes.** Your vision may seem dim, blurry, or dull. There may be short periods of time where your vision completely disappears. You might have trouble with peripheral (side) vision. You also may have double vision or other vision problems when you stoop down or bend over.
- **Hearing problems,** such as a rushing, swishing or ringing sound in your ear.
- **Nausea and vomiting.**

How is pseudotumor cerebri diagnosed?

Your ophthalmologist will do a series of tests. They may include:

- An eye exam. Your ophthalmologist will check your optic nerve for swelling. He or she will also test to see if you have any blank spots in your field of vision.
- An MRI or CT scan. These scans help to check whether your symptoms are due to PTC or caused by other medical problems.
- A spinal tap. This is when your doctor measures the pressure of your spinal fluid. He or she will also draw fluid to test it for any problems.

How is pseudotumor cerebri treated?

You might not need any treatment if PTC is not causing severe headaches or vision loss. If you do need treatment, here are some options:

- Your doctor may prescribe medicine that treats glaucoma to help lower your CSF pressure. You might also be prescribed diuretics—medicine that helps your body get rid of excess fluid.
- If you are overweight or obese, your doctor may want you to lose weight.
- To protect your optic nerve from further damage, your ophthalmologist may make a tiny hole or several tiny slits in part of the optic nerve. This helps relieve some of the pressure on the nerve.
- If your symptoms are severe, your ophthalmologist may want you to have a shunt placed in your head. This is a tiny tube that carries fluid away from where it builds up. Then the fluid can be absorbed elsewhere in the body. This procedure lowers the pressure in your head.

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Summary

Pseudotumor cerebri (PTC) is when pressure in your head rises, causing vision problems and headaches. This high pressure comes from cerebrospinal fluid (CSF) that does not flow out of the brain as it should. The pressure affects the eye's optic disc and nerve, eventually causing vision loss.

PTC is more common in young, overweight women, and hormones are the suspected cause. Sometimes children and adults who are not overweight have PTC. Antibiotics, steroids or high doses of vitamin A can also cause PTC.

Treatment may not be needed if symptoms are not severe. But if they are, medicine or surgery may be recommended to help lower pressure in the head.

Get more information about eye health from EyeSmart—provided by the American Academy of Ophthalmology—at aao.org/eyesmart.

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