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SPECIFIC FEATURES OF FACIAL NERVE NEUROPATHY IN CHILDREN BORN WITH HYDROCEPHALY

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Abstract: This article examines the specific features of facial nerve (nervus facialis) neuropathy in children born with hydrocephalus. In such cases, the excessive accumulation of cerebrospinal fluid within the brain increases intracranial pressure, which can lead to compression or stretching of the facial nerve. This condition often results in facial muscle weakness or paralysis, asymmetrical facial expressions, and impaired feeding and swallowing reflexes in newborns. The study highlights the clinical manifestations, possible causes, and diagnostic methods, including neuroimaging and neurophysiological testing. It also emphasizes the importance of early diagnosis and timely intervention, such as surgical shunt placement and rehabilitative therapy. The research underscores that proper multidisciplinary management can improve functional outcomes and support the overall neurodevelopment of affected children.

Keywords: Hydrocephalus, Facial Nerve, Neuropathy, Intracranial Pressure, Shunt Surgery, Cerebrospinal Fluid, Facial Palsy, Electromyography.

ОСОБЕННОСТИ НЕВРОПАТИИ ЛИЦЕВОГО НЕРВА У ДЕТЕЙ, РОЖДЕННЫХ С ГИДРОЦЕФАЛИЕЙ

Аннотация: В статье рассматриваются особенности невропатии лицевого нерва (nervus facialis) у детей, родившихся с гидроцефалией. В таких случаях избыточное скопление спинномозговой жидкости в головном мозге повышает внутричерепное давление, что может привести к сдавливанию или растяжению лицевого нерва. Это состояние часто приводит к слабости или параличу лицевых мышц, асимметричному выражению лица и нарушению рефлексов кормления и глотания у новорожденных. В исследовании рассматриваются клинические проявления, возможные причины и методы диагностики, включая нейровизуализацию и нейрофизиологическое тестирование. В нем также подчеркивается важность ранней диагностики и своевременного вмешательства, такого как хирургическая установка шунта и реабилитационная терапия. Исследование подчеркивает, что правильное междисциплинарное лечение может улучшить функциональные результаты и поддержать общее неврологическое развитие детей с этим заболеванием.

Ключевые слова: гидроцефалия, лицевой нерв, невропатия, внутричерепное давление, шунтирующая хирургия, спинномозговая жидкость, паралич лицевого нерва, электромиография.

Introduction

In recent years, there has been a noticeable increase in congenital neurological disorders, including hydrocephalus, which has drawn significant attention from specialists in pediatrics and neurology. Hydrocephalus is a complex condition characterized by the accumulation of cerebrospinal fluid (CSF) within the brain's ventricular system, leading to increased intracranial pressure and a range of neurological complications. Among the numerous consequences associated with hydrocephalus, neuropathy of the facial nerve (nervus facialis) is one of the most clinically important. Facial nerve neuropathy in newborns can present with facial asymmetry,

reduced muscle tone, incomplete eye closure, and difficulties with feeding, all of which can significantly impact a child's quality of life, both functionally and socially. The relevance of studying this condition lies in the early identification and understanding of the pathophysiological mechanisms, clinical presentation, and diagnostic approaches to facial nerve involvement in children with hydrocephalus. Early recognition and management of facial neuropathy can aid in timely intervention and rehabilitation, potentially minimizing long-term complications and improving developmental outcomes.

Literature review and method

Hydrocephalus is a neurological condition characterized by an abnormal buildup of cerebrospinal fluid (CSF) within the brain's ventricles. This excess fluid increases intracranial pressure, potentially damaging brain tissues. Congenital hydrocephalus is present at birth and is often caused by genetic abnormalities, intrauterine infections, or developmental brain malformations. The condition interferes with normal brain growth and function, particularly in neonates and infants. If not detected early, hydrocephalus can lead to cognitive delay, motor dysfunction, vision problems, and other neurological issues. Clinical signs may include an enlarged head, vomiting, irritability, and seizures. Treatment typically involves surgical insertion of a shunt to divert excess fluid. Long-term monitoring is crucial due to possible complications or shunt failure. Hydrocephalus may also compress or stretch cranial nerves, including the facial nerve.

The facial nerve (cranial nerve VII) is a mixed nerve responsible for facial expressions, salivation, tear production, and taste sensation from the anterior two-thirds of the tongue. Originating in the brainstem, it exits the skull through the stylomastoid foramen and branches extensively across the face. It innervates the muscles of facial expression, allowing for non-verbal communication and essential actions like blinking and chewing. The nerve also carries parasympathetic fibers to the lacrimal and salivary glands. Its close anatomical passage through the temporal bone makes it vulnerable to pressure-related damage. Any disruption in its function can cause weakness or paralysis of facial muscles, known as facial palsy. In neonates, this may present as asymmetrical crying, difficulty feeding, and an inability to close the eye. Understanding its path helps localize lesions and guide therapy.

Facial nerve neuropathy in children with hydrocephalus is commonly linked to increased intracranial pressure, which affects the brain and its nerves. The facial nerve is especially at risk because it travels through narrow, bony canals within the skull, making it susceptible to compression. The accumulation of CSF stretches brain tissues and can displace structures, pressing on cranial nerves. Congenital malformations of the brainstem or skull can also affect the nerve directly. Other potential causes include perinatal infections (e.g., cytomegalovirus), birth trauma, or hypoxic-ischemic injury during delivery. In cases of severe hydrocephalus, the ventricles expand, further distorting neural pathways. This pressure and displacement can damage the facial nerve, leading to varying degrees of neuropathy. Recognizing these risk factors is key to early diagnosis and prevention of long-term deficits.

Children with facial nerve neuropathy typically present with facial asymmetry, decreased muscle tone, and poor eye closure on the affected side. Additional signs include drooling, difficulties with sucking and feeding, and a lack of facial expression. In neonates, these symptoms may be subtle and require careful clinical evaluation. Diagnosis is based on physical examination, cranial nerve assessment, and neurologic reflex testing. Electromyography (EMG) can be used to assess muscle activity and nerve conduction. Imaging techniques such as MRI or CT scans help visualize brain structures, CSF accumulation, and possible nerve compression. Early diagnosis is crucial for initiating proper treatment and minimizing functional impairments. Neuropathy severity can range from mild paresis to complete facial paralysis. In some cases, symptoms improve spontaneously; in others, rehabilitation is needed.

Management of facial nerve neuropathy in hydrocephalic infants requires a multidisciplinary approach. Initially, medications may include corticosteroids to reduce inflammation and neuroprotective agents to support nerve recovery. Treating the underlying hydrocephalus with surgical shunt placement is often essential to relieve intracranial pressure. Physical therapy, including facial massage and muscle stimulation, helps maintain tone and prevent atrophy. Occupational and speech therapy may also be needed for developmental support. Regular neurologic follow-ups are crucial to assess nerve function and detect any recurrence. In some cases, surgical decompression of the nerve may be considered. Psychological and emotional support for the family is also important, as visible facial paralysis can affect bonding and development. The earlier treatment begins, the better the prognosis for functional recovery.

Discussion

Facial nerve neuropathy in children born with hydrocephalus presents a complex clinical challenge, often involving both central and peripheral mechanisms. The increased intracranial pressure caused by excess cerebrospinal fluid can compress or displace the facial nerve, particularly as it traverses the narrow facial canal within the temporal bone. In neonates, this neuropathy may manifest with subtle signs that are easily overlooked, such as asymmetric crying, poor feeding, or incomplete eyelid closure. Hence, early identification is crucial for initiating timely intervention.

Multiple factors influence the development of facial nerve neuropathy in these children, including the severity and duration of hydrocephalus, the age at which it develops, and whether surgical decompression (e.g., shunting) has been performed. In congenital cases, facial nerve involvement may be due not only to pressure but also to associated brainstem malformations or neurodevelopmental anomalies. From a diagnostic perspective, combining clinical evaluation with advanced imaging techniques like MRI and CT scans allows for a more accurate understanding of the underlying pathology. Moreover, neurophysiological assessments such as EMG provide insights into the extent of nerve damage and can help guide prognosis.

Treatment outcomes are closely linked to the timing of intervention. Children who receive early surgical correction of hydrocephalus and begin physiotherapy soon after tend to have better recovery of facial function. However, long-term follow-up is necessary, as delayed or incomplete nerve regeneration may require additional therapeutic or surgical interventions.

Conclusion

Facial nerve neuropathy in children born with hydrocephalus is a significant neurological complication that requires early recognition and comprehensive care. The increased intracranial pressure caused by the accumulation of cerebrospinal fluid can compress the facial nerve, leading to varying degrees of motor dysfunction and facial asymmetry. This condition may negatively affect essential functions such as feeding, speech development, and emotional expression during the critical period of early childhood. Understanding the anatomical course of the facial nerve and its vulnerability in hydrocephalic conditions is vital for accurate diagnosis and treatment planning. Timely surgical intervention to relieve intracranial pressure, combined with rehabilitative therapies, can substantially improve outcomes. Moreover, continuous monitoring and a multidisciplinary approach involving neurology, neurosurgery, and pediatric rehabilitation are key to ensuring optimal development and minimizing long-term disability.

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