

DEFINITION

1. A hydrocele is a collection of serous fluid between the layers of the membrane (**tunica vaginalis**) which covers the testis. Those layers are normally held in apposition by the cohesion of their moist surfaces.

CLASSIFICATION

2. Congenital
3. Acquired
 - 3.1. Primary or idiopathic
 - 3.2. Secondary

CLINICAL MANIFESTATIONS

4. Hydrocele usually only manifests itself by the presence of painless swelling which progressively enlarges.
5. In the secondary form, there may be manifestations of the primary cause and pain with tenderness may occur.
6. In old-standing cases, haemorrhage may occasionally occur into the sac or its walls may become calcified.

AETIOLOGY

7. A hydrocele may be produced by one or other of four mechanisms –
 - 7.1. excessive production of fluid within the sac
 - 7.2. defective absorption of fluid by the tunica vaginalis
 - 7.3. interference with the drainage of fluid by the lymphatic vessels
 - 7.4. by connection of the cavity within the tunica vaginalis with the peritoneal cavity
8. **CONGENITAL HYDROCELE**, as the name indicates, results from a congenital malformation of the tunica vaginalis. As such, it is causally unrelated to external factors.
9. **PRIMARY ACQUIRED HYDROCELE** appears to be most commonly produced by the mechanism of defective absorption. Although the reason for the defective absorption is obscure, the most probable explanation is that there has been damage to the endothelial wall of the tunica by low-grade infection. The condition appears most often in middle-aged or elderly men but is not uncommon in early childhood.

10. **SECONDARY ACQUIRED HYDROCELE** is usually a consequence of infection of the testis, the most common causes being gonorrhoea, syphilis, tuberculosis and filariasis. It may also follow trauma to the testis or be secondary to tumours of the testis.

CONCLUSION

11. Congenital hydrocele is present from birth even though it may not make its presence known until a later time. Primary (or idiopathic) acquired hydrocele is one in relation to which an obvious cause cannot be demonstrated. It is thought to possibly result from low-grade infection. Secondary acquired hydrocele may result from a variety of primary causes. Trauma may worsen an existing hydrocele.

REFERENCE

Mann C V and Russell R C G (Eds). Bailey and Love's Short Practice of Surgery. 21st Ed. 1992. London. Chapman & Hall Medical. p1483-1486.

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