Spinal Osteochondromas in People with MHE: What to Know

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Background

Osteochondromas can develop in the spine. When they grow inside the spinal canal, they can press on the spinal cord or nerves; this is called neural impingement. While rare, it can cause serious symptoms like weakness or even paralysis.

Researchers at a single U.S. hospital followed 94 people with MHE over 12 years. Everyone had an MRI of their spine. **They looked at how common spinal osteochondromas were, where they were located, and whether they caused any nerve-related problems.**

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Key Findings

Spinal osteochondromas were common, but most were harmless.

- 47% of people studied had spinal osteochondromas.
- Only 4% (4 out of 94 people) had spinal growths that pressed on nerves.

Most people with spinal osteochondromas did not need surgery.

- 2 patients had immediate surgery due to weakness.
- 1 was watched for 2 years and later needed surgery; 1 stayed stable with monitoring.

No clear risk factors were found.

- Having rib or pelvic osteochondromas did NOT predict spinal involvement.
- Age, gender, and race were also not predictive.

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What This Means for People with MHE

Growths on the ribs or pelvis, don't predict spine involvement.

MRI surveillance may not be needed for everyone with MHE.

- There may be value in a "single screening MRI" when your child is old enough to stay still during the scan without anesthesia.
- It is important to see a spine surgeon if your child has symptoms like weakness, numbness, clumsiness, loss of bladder control or unexplained and persistent pain that limits activities.

Watch for subtle signs. Not all problems are obvious. **Communicate with your care team if your child has pain, clumsiness, or changes in strength or balance.**

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Takeaway

Spinal involvement in MHE is not rare, but serious complications are uncommon. **Early identification and monitoring can prevent long-term harm.** Talk with your physician about imaging, questions, and concerns.

The best decisions are made with a trusted physician.
This is not intended to replace a discussion with your care team.

Monroig-Rivera, Carlos MD1; Bockhorn, Lauren MD1,2; Thornberg, David BS1; Santillan, Brenda BS1,2; Rathjen, Karl E. MD1,2,a. Prevalence of Osteochondromas in the Spine in Patients with Multiple Hereditary Exostoses. JBJS Open Access 10(1):e24.00072, January-March 2025. | DOI: 10.2106/JBJS.OA.24.00072

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