

SEPTEMBER IS CHIARI AWARENESS MONTH

To Open or Not to Open, That is the Question....

Traditionally, Chiari decompression surgery has involved opening and expanding the dura (the covering of the brain). Some years ago, however, some surgeons started performing bone-only decompressions on children (dura is left alone), and found they worked. Since that time, there has been a vigorous debate in the surgical community about whether it is better to open the dura or at least in some cases, don't open it. Over time the bone only decompression has been tried on adults as well, and even on patients with syringomyelia. The data shows that by not opening the dura, the surgical complication rate goes way down – along with surgical time, hospital stay, and pain; but the rate for re-surgeries goes up. Other surgeons have tried to find middle ground by scoring the dura, or peeling back some layers but not completely opening it. In the end, there may not be a single answer as to which technique is better, it may come down to careful patient selection, and also whether the patient would prefer a less invasive surgery but an increased chance they have to have a second operation.

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