

Deciphering Medical Jargon



The following are thirty of the most common medical terms listed alphabetically - associated with Chiari, and their definitions. Taken as a set, they constitute the minimum that an informed patient should have an awareness and understanding of. It is by no means a complete list of the terms a patient is likely to come across. Rather, they serve as a starting point for those who want to begin deciphering the medical jargon necessary to gain a true understanding of Chiari.

1. **brainstem** - part of the brain which connects to the spinal cord; controls critical functions such as breathing and swallowing
2. **central canal** - very center of the spinal cord, so named because it starts as a hollow tube which closes in most people as they age
3. **cerebellar tonsils** - portion of the cerebellum located at the bottom, so named because of their shape
4. **cerebellum** - part of the brain located at the bottom of the skull, near the opening to the spinal area; important for muscle control, movement, and balance
5. **cerebrospinal fluid (CSF)** - clear liquid in the brain and spinal cord, acts as a shock absorber
6. **cervical** - the upper part of the spine; the neck area
7. **Chiari malformation** - condition where the cerebellar tonsils are displaced out of the skull area into the spinal area, causing compression of brain tissue and disruption of CSF flow
8. **Chiari II** - more severe form of malformation which involves descent of parts of the brainstem and is usually associated with Spina Bifida
9. **cine MRI** - type of MRI which can measure CSF flow
10. **craniovertebral junction** - the area where the skull and spine meet
11. **cranium** - the skull
12. **craniectomy** - surgical technique where part of the skull is removed
13. **decompression surgery** - general term used for any of several surgical techniques employed to create more space around a Chiari malformation and to relieve compression
14. **dura** - tough, outer covering of the brain and spinal cord

15. **duraplasty** - surgical technique where the dura is opened and expanded by sewing a patch into it
16. **foramen magnum** - opening at the base of the skull, through which the brain and spinal cord connect
17. **graft** - material, or tissue, surgically implanted into a body part to replace or repair a defect
18. **herniate** - to protrude through an opening abnormally
19. **hydrocephalus** - a condition where there is an unusually large amount of CSF in the brain, resulting in swollen ventricles
20. **ICP** - intracranial pressure; pressure of the CSF inside the skull
21. **laminectomy** - surgical technique where part of a vertebra is removed
22. **lumbar** - the lower part of the spine
23. **magnetic resonance imaging (MRI)** - diagnostic device which uses a strong magnetic field to create images of the body's internal parts -**posterior fossa** - depression on the inside of the back of the skull, near the base, where the cerebellum is normally situated
24. **syringomyelia (SM)** - neurological condition where a fluid filled cyst forms in the spinal cord
25. **syrinx** - fluid filled cyst in the spinal cord
26. **thoracic** - relating to the middle part of the spine, or chest area
27. **tonsillar herniation** - descent of the cerebellar tonsils into the spinal area; often measured in mm
28. **Valsalva maneuver** - a straining activity which in Chiari patients often causes an immediate headache
29. **vertebra** - one of the individual bones of the spinal column

Source: Conquer Chiari: A Patient's Guide to the Chiari Malformation – Second Edition, page 39-40