Genetic Support Foundation

Neural Tube Defects

Sometimes prenatal genetic tests, including ultrasound, may identify a birth defect in the baby. Some birth defects are mild and treatable, and some are severe. An example of birth defects that may be detected with prenatal testing are neural tube defects, such as spina bifida and anencephaly. The neural tube is the structure that develops into the brain and spinal cord early in the development of the baby. Neural tube defects involve an opening somewhere along the spine or the skull.

Spina Bifida

Spina bifida occurs when there is incomplete closure of the baby's spine. It typically causes some degree of physical disability and may also cause intellectual disabilities. However, most people with spina bifida have normal intelligence. Children with spina bifida can often walk with assistive devices, while others need to use a wheelchair.

Spina Bifida

Spina Bifida

Spina Bifida

Anencephaly

Anencephaly is another type of neural tube defect that is more serious. It occurs when there is incomplete closure of the baby's skull. Many babies with anencephaly are stillborn. Even those who are born with this condition typically pass away shortly after birth. In rare cases, babies with anencephaly may survive longer.

Anencephaly

You can find more information and videos about prenatal genetic testing options at: www.doh.wa.gov and www.geneticsupportfoundation.org.

OTHER RESOURCES:

Spina Bifida-related resources

Spina bifida fact sheet- http://www.ninds.nih.gov/disorders/spina_bifida/detail_spina_bifida.htm

Spina Bifida Association- http://spinabifidaassociation.org/expectantparent/

Anencephaly-related resources

Information about anencephaly in multiple languages- http://www.anencephaly.info/e/faq.php

Information about anencephaly- http://www.ninds.nih.gov/disorders/anencephaly/anencephaly.htm

Information about perinatal hospice- http://www.perinatalhospice.org/

Information about organ & tissue donation- http://purposefulgift.com/en/