



Multidisciplinary Management of Cavernous sinus thrombosis: Early Recognition, Rapid Response, and Integrated Hospital Care Pathways-An Updated Review

Mobarak Fahad Mobarak Aldossari ⁽¹⁾ , Mohammed Mesfer Mohammed Aldawsari ⁽²⁾ , Ahmad Talal Matar Almarshadi ⁽³⁾ , Minahi Fehaid Musaibeeh Alotaibi ⁽⁴⁾ , Ahmed Alsulayyih ⁽⁵⁾ , Saber Hamed Maqbul Alsharari ⁽⁶⁾ , Naji Mohammed Saleh Al-Qahtani ⁽⁷⁾ , Hassan Mohammed Mohammed Tomihi ⁽⁸⁾ , Fares Zaban Alrowiliy ⁽⁹⁾ , Youssef Farhan H Alsharari ⁽¹⁰⁾ , Hassan Mohammed Mohammed Tomihi ⁽⁸⁾ , Huda Yahya Albeshi ⁽¹¹⁾

(1) Wadi Aldawaser General Hospital, Ministry of Health, Saudi Arabia,

(2) Wadi Aldawaser Hospital, Ministry of Health, Saudi Arabia,

(3) Diriyah Hospital, Riyadh, Ministry of Health, Saudi Arabia,

(4) Al-Dawadmi General Hospital, Ministry of Health, Saudi Arabia,

(5) Imam Abdulrahman Alfaisal National Guard Hospital, Ministry of Health, Saudi Arabia,

(6) Saudi Red Crescent Authority, Tabuk, Saudi Arabia,

(7) Al-Farshah General Hospital, Aseer Health Cluster, Ministry of Health, Saudi Arabia,

(8) Damad General Hospital, Jazan, Ministry of Health, Saudi Arabia,

(9) Al-Eisawiyah Center, Al-Jouf, Ministry of Health, Saudi Arabia,

(10) King Abdulaziz Specialist Hospital, Sakaka, Ministry of Health, Saudi Arabia,

(11) Ghubairah, Riyadh, Ministry of Health, Saudi Arabia

Abstract

Background: Functional abdominal pain (FAP) is a prevalent pediatric condition characterized by recurrent or persistent abdominal discomfort without identifiable structural or biochemical abnormalities. Diagnosis relies on the Rome IV symptom-based criteria, emphasizing the gut–brain axis dysregulation and minimizing unnecessary investigations.

Aim: To summarize multidisciplinary perspectives on the etiology, epidemiology, clinical presentation, diagnostic evaluation, and management of pediatric FAP.

Methods: A comprehensive narrative review of current evidence addressing biological, psychosocial, and environmental contributors to FAP, along with clinical guidelines for assessment and therapeutic approaches.

Results: FAP arises from a multifactorial interplay involving visceral hypersensitivity, altered gut microbiota, motility disturbances, and psychosocial stressors. The global prevalence is approximately 11.7%, with higher rates in females. Evaluation prioritizes history, physical examination, and identification of alarm features, whereas excessive testing offers limited diagnostic value. Effective management requires education, psychosocial interventions, lifestyle modifications, and selective dietary or pharmacological therapies.

Conclusion: FAP is a chronic, multifaceted disorder requiring a biopsychosocial, multidisciplinary management strategy to restore function and improve quality of life.

Keywords: Functional abdominal pain, pediatrics, visceral hypersensitivity, Rome IV criteria, gut–brain axis, diagnosis, management, epidemiology.

Introduction

Cavernous sinus thrombosis represents an uncommon yet potentially fatal clinical condition that most frequently develops as a complication of underlying infectious processes. This disorder is often associated with septic origins, including infections of the facial region, paranasal sinuses, orbit, pharynx, and middle ear. These primary infections may spread through venous channels to the cavernous sinus, leading to thrombus formation and subsequent neurological compromise. In addition to infectious etiologies, noninfectious or aseptic factors such as craniofacial trauma and surgical interventions may

also contribute to the development of this condition, particularly in individuals with an underlying predisposition to hypercoagulability or thrombophilia. The clinical presentation of cavernous sinus thrombosis is frequently acute and progressive, requiring a high index of suspicion for timely diagnosis. Common presenting features include fever, severe headache, periorbital edema, and ophthalmoplegia, reflecting the anatomical structures involved within and around the cavernous sinus. The proximity of cranial nerves responsible for ocular movement and facial sensation contributes to the characteristic neurological manifestations observed in

affected patients. Given the rapid progression and potential for serious complications, early identification remains a critical determinant of clinical outcomes. Prompt initiation of appropriate management, including broad-spectrum antimicrobial therapy and anticoagulation, is essential in reducing morbidity and mortality. However, despite advances in therapeutic strategies, the condition continues to carry a considerable risk of long-term complications. Patients may experience persistent neurological deficits such as visual impairment, diplopia, or even cerebrovascular events, including stroke. These sequelae underscore the importance of early diagnosis, aggressive treatment, and close clinical monitoring. Overall, cavernous sinus thrombosis remains a serious medical emergency that demands multidisciplinary attention and rapid intervention to optimize patient prognosis and minimize adverse outcomes [1][2][3][4][5].

Etiology

Cavernous sinus thrombosis is most commonly associated with septic processes, although noninfectious mechanisms may also contribute to its development. In the majority of cases, the condition arises as a complication of infections located in anatomically adjacent regions, particularly within the central facial area known as the nasolabial triangle, which extends from the corners of the mouth to the bridge of the nose. This region has a unique venous drainage system characterized by valveless veins, allowing retrograde spread of infection to the cavernous sinus. Local infections such as facial abscesses and cellulitis frequently serve as primary sources. In addition, infections involving deeper structures, including sphenoid and ethmoid sinusitis, otitis media, and mastoiditis, are well-recognized contributors. Dental and maxillofacial procedures, including tooth extractions and surgical interventions, may introduce pathogens into the venous circulation, particularly through the pterygoid venous plexus, thereby facilitating thrombus formation within the cavernous sinus. Although septic causes predominate, aseptic etiologies such as cranial trauma, neurosurgical procedures, and physiological states like pregnancy can also precipitate thrombosis, especially in individuals with underlying prothrombotic tendencies [6]. A wide spectrum of infectious organisms has been implicated in cavernous sinus thrombosis, with bacterial pathogens accounting for the majority of cases. Among these, *Staphylococcus aureus* is the most frequently isolated organism, responsible for approximately two-thirds of reported cases, and includes strains with resistance to methicillin. Other bacterial agents contribute to a smaller but clinically significant proportion of infections. *Streptococcus* species are identified in nearly one-fifth of cases, while *Streptococcus pneumoniae* accounts for a smaller percentage. Gram-negative organisms such as *Proteus*, *Haemophilus*, *Pseudomonas*, *Fusobacterium*, and *Bacteroides* are

also implicated, alongside gram-positive organisms including *Corynebacterium* and *Actinomyces*. Notably, several of these pathogens, particularly *Bacteroides*, *Actinomyces*, and *Fusobacterium*, are anaerobic bacteria, which may influence both the clinical course and therapeutic approach. Although less common, fungal infections can also lead to cavernous sinus thrombosis, particularly in immunocompromised individuals. The most frequently reported fungal pathogens include *Aspergillus* species, *Mucor* species causing mucormycosis, and organisms responsible for coccidioidomycosis. Rare etiological agents extend beyond bacterial and fungal causes to include parasitic infections such as toxoplasmosis, malaria, and trichinosis, as well as viral pathogens including herpes simplex virus, cytomegalovirus, measles virus, hepatitis viruses, and human immunodeficiency virus, although these are infrequently encountered in clinical practice.

Several risk factors significantly increase the likelihood of developing cavernous sinus thrombosis, particularly those that impair immune function or promote a hypercoagulable state. Immunosuppression represents a major predisposing condition and may result from poorly controlled diabetes mellitus, chronic corticosteroid use, malignancy, or chemotherapy. These factors not only increase susceptibility to infection but also impair the body's ability to contain and localize infectious processes, facilitating their spread to intracranial structures. Among all risk factors, infections of the face, paranasal sinuses, and periorbital region remain the most critical contributors, given their direct anatomical and vascular connections to the cavernous sinus. Hypercoagulability, whether inherited or acquired, also plays a central role in the pathogenesis of cavernous sinus thrombosis. Genetic thrombophilic conditions, including factor V Leiden mutation, prothrombin G20210A mutation, and deficiencies of natural anticoagulants such as antithrombin III, protein C, and protein S, predispose individuals to thrombus formation. Elevated levels of coagulation factors, such as factor VIII, further enhance this risk. Hormonal influences are also relevant, as women who are pregnant, in the postpartum period, or using oral contraceptives or hormone replacement therapy exhibit an increased tendency toward thrombosis due to changes in coagulation pathways. Acquired conditions that alter hemostasis or vascular integrity further contribute to disease risk. These include antiphospholipid antibody syndrome, which promotes abnormal clot formation, and hyperhomocysteinemia, which is associated with endothelial dysfunction. Heparin-induced thrombocytopenia represents another prothrombotic state that may lead to paradoxical clot formation despite anticoagulant exposure. Additional contributing factors include obesity, which is associated with chronic inflammation and altered coagulation profiles.

Systemic conditions such as severe dehydration, particularly in hyperosmolar nonketotic states, may increase blood viscosity and promote thrombosis. Similarly, nephrotic syndrome, characterized by loss of anticoagulant proteins in the urine, and sickle cell disease, which involves abnormal red blood cell morphology and vascular occlusion, are recognized as contributing factors. Overall, the etiology of cavernous sinus thrombosis reflects a complex interplay between infectious sources, vascular anatomy, and individual predisposition to thrombosis. Understanding these contributing factors is essential for early recognition, targeted prevention, and effective management of this potentially life-threatening condition [7][8][9][10].



Fig. 1: Cavernous sinus thrombosis.

Epidemiology

Cavernous sinus thrombosis is an uncommon clinical entity, and its precise incidence remains difficult to establish due to its rarity and the variability in reported cases across different populations. It represents a small proportion of the broader category of cerebral venous and sinus thrombosis, accounting for approximately 1% to 4% of all cases within this group. Cerebral venous and sinus thrombosis itself has an estimated annual incidence ranging from 2 to 4 cases per million individuals. Based on these figures, the estimated incidence of cavernous sinus thrombosis is considerably lower, approximating 0.2 to 1.6 cases per 100,000 individuals per year. These estimates highlight the infrequent nature of the condition while also emphasizing the challenges associated with accurate epidemiological measurement, particularly in regions with limited diagnostic resources or inconsistent reporting systems [11]. The distribution of cavernous sinus thrombosis across sex groups remains an area of some variability in the literature. Unlike cerebral venous thrombosis as a whole, which demonstrates a well-documented female predominance often attributed to hormonal and reproductive factors, cavernous sinus thrombosis does not consistently follow this pattern. Several studies suggest the absence of a clear sex-based predisposition, while others report a slight predominance in males. For example, Weerasinghe and Lueck identified a male-to-female ratio of

approximately 2:1 in a cohort of septic adult cases. Similar observations have been reported in smaller case series, including studies by Thatai et al. and Smith et al., both of which noted a modest male predominance. These findings suggest that the epidemiological profile of cavernous sinus thrombosis may differ from other forms of venous thrombosis, possibly reflecting differences in underlying etiological factors such as infection patterns rather than hormonal influences [12].

Age distribution also provides important epidemiological insights. Historically, cerebral venous thrombosis, including cavernous sinus thrombosis, has been reported more frequently in pediatric populations, particularly among neonates and young children. This increased susceptibility may be related to developmental factors, infection risk, and variations in immune response. However, the impact of modern medical interventions on this pattern remains uncertain. The widespread implementation of routine childhood vaccination programs and the early use of antibiotics in the management of infections may have altered the incidence and presentation of this condition in younger populations, although definitive conclusions are limited by the scarcity of large-scale longitudinal data. Over time, both the incidence and mortality associated with cavernous sinus thrombosis appear to have declined. This trend is largely attributed to advancements in medical care, particularly the early recognition and prompt treatment of infections with effective antimicrobial agents. The availability and widespread use of antibiotics have significantly reduced the progression of localized infections to severe intracranial complications. Additionally, improvements in diagnostic imaging and clinical awareness have contributed to earlier detection and intervention, which may further influence reported incidence rates. Despite these advances, cavernous sinus thrombosis remains a serious condition with potentially significant morbidity, underscoring the importance of continued vigilance in clinical practice and ongoing research to better define its epidemiological characteristics [12].

Pathophysiology

The cavernous sinuses are paired venous structures situated bilaterally adjacent to the sella turcica, positioned superior and lateral to the sphenoid sinus. Anatomically, each cavernous sinus extends from the superior orbital fissure anteriorly to the petrous apex of the temporal bone posteriorly. Structurally, these sinuses consist of a network of trabeculated venous channels formed by layers of dura mater, creating a complex vascular space filled with venous blood. Venous inflow is primarily derived from the superior and inferior ophthalmic veins, as well as contributions from superficial cortical veins. Venous outflow occurs posteriorly through the superior and inferior petrosal sinuses, which connect to the basilar venous plexus. This extensive network

establishes the cavernous sinus as a central hub within the intracranial venous circulation, facilitating communication between extracranial and intracranial vascular systems. The cavernous sinus maintains a close anatomical relationship with several critical neurovascular structures, a feature that underlies the severity of clinical manifestations associated with its pathology. Within the lumen of the sinus traverse the horizontal segment of the internal carotid artery, the surrounding sympathetic plexus, and the abducens nerve. In contrast, the lateral wall of the cavernous sinus contains cranial nerves responsible for ocular movement and facial sensation, including the oculomotor nerve, the trochlear nerve, and the ophthalmic and maxillary divisions of the trigeminal nerve. This intimate anatomical arrangement explains the high likelihood of neurological deficits when pathological processes, such as thrombosis or infection, involve the cavernous sinus. The development of cavernous sinus thrombosis is closely linked to the unique characteristics of the cranial venous system, particularly the absence of valves within the dural venous sinuses and their communicating veins. This anatomical feature permits bidirectional blood flow, allowing infectious agents to spread from superficial facial regions to intracranial structures. Septic thrombosis commonly arises from contiguous spread of infection through the facial and ophthalmic venous systems. Infections originating in the paranasal sinuses, especially the sphenoid and ethmoid sinuses, represent some of the most frequent sources. Additional contributing conditions include facial cellulitis or abscesses within the nasolabial region, periorbital and orbital infections, pharyngeal and tonsillar infections, otitis media, mastoiditis, and dental infections associated with invasive procedures [13].

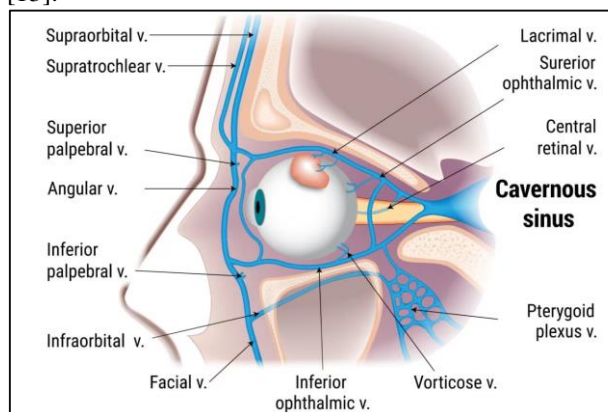


Fig. 1: Cavernous sinus anatomy and positions.

At the mechanistic level, thrombosis is initiated by the introduction and propagation of infectious organisms within the venous circulation. These pathogens can induce endothelial injury, activate coagulation pathways, and promote thrombus formation within the cavernous sinus. The resulting thrombus not only obstructs venous drainage but also serves as a nidus that traps infectious material,

facilitating local inflammation and further propagation of the disease process. Impaired venous outflow from the facial and ophthalmic veins leads to increased venous pressure and congestion, which clinically manifests as periorbital edema, facial swelling, ptosis, proptosis, and chemosis. Patients frequently experience pain exacerbated by ocular movement, reflecting both mechanical and inflammatory involvement of adjacent structures. Elevated intracranial venous pressure may also contribute to papilledema, retinal venous engorgement, and progressive visual impairment. The absence of valves within the venous system allows thrombus extension beyond the initial site of formation. The cavernous sinuses communicate with each other via intercavernous channels located anterior and posterior to the sella turcica, enabling bilateral spread of thrombosis and infection. This interconnected system also facilitates the extension of thrombus into other dural venous sinuses and cortical veins, thereby increasing the risk of widespread intracranial involvement. Neurological deficits in cavernous sinus thrombosis primarily result from compression and inflammation of the cranial nerves located within or adjacent to the sinus. Dysfunction of the abducens nerve is often the earliest and most frequently observed manifestation, leading to impaired lateral eye movement and resulting in diplopia. As the pathological process progresses, involvement of the oculomotor and trochlear nerves may occur, producing more extensive ophthalmoplegia and limiting eye movement in multiple directions. Autonomic dysfunction may arise due to disruption of sympathetic and parasympathetic fibers, leading to abnormalities in pupillary responses, including either constriction or dilation depending on the fibers affected. Sensory disturbances involving the ophthalmic and maxillary branches of the trigeminal nerve may result in numbness, paresthesia, or pain in the distribution of the forehead, eye, and midface [13].

The pathological consequences of cavernous sinus thrombosis extend beyond localized neurovascular compromise. Due to the extensive venous connections, infection can disseminate to the central nervous system, resulting in serious complications such as meningitis, subdural empyema, or brain abscess formation. Furthermore, the venous system provides a pathway for systemic spread of infection. Septic emboli may travel through the internal jugular vein to the pulmonary circulation, leading to pulmonary complications including abscess formation, pneumonia, or pleural empyema. Vascular complications may also arise as a consequence of the close relationship between the cavernous sinus and the internal carotid artery. Inflammatory processes can lead to arterial narrowing or vasculitis, increasing the risk of ischemic stroke. Additionally, thrombosis of adjacent cortical veins may result in hemorrhagic infarction of brain tissue. Endocrine dysfunction is another potential complication, as the pituitary gland

lies in close proximity to the cavernous sinus. Ischemic injury or direct spread of infection to the pituitary may lead to hypopituitarism, further contributing to the systemic impact of the disease. Overall, the pathophysiology of cavernous sinus thrombosis reflects a complex interplay between anatomical vulnerability, infectious spread, vascular obstruction, and neurological involvement. The unique structural and functional characteristics of the cavernous sinus and its surrounding components explain the rapid progression and potentially severe complications associated with this condition [13].

History and Physical

The clinical presentation of cavernous sinus thrombosis is often acute or subacute in onset and reflects the combined effects of infection, venous congestion, and cranial nerve involvement. A detailed clinical history is essential for early recognition, as initial symptoms may appear nonspecific but rapidly evolve into a severe and potentially life-threatening condition. Fever is one of the most common presenting complaints and frequently accompanies other systemic and localized manifestations. Headache is reported in a substantial proportion of patients, ranging from approximately half to nearly all cases, and is often described as severe and progressive. In addition to these systemic symptoms, patients frequently report periorbital swelling, ocular discomfort, and visual disturbances. These visual symptoms may include photophobia, diplopia, and varying degrees of visual impairment, all of which reflect the involvement of orbital structures and cranial nerves. The temporal progression of symptoms provides important diagnostic clues. In many cases, manifestations initially affect one eye and subsequently extend to the contralateral side, consistent with the anatomical communication between the cavernous sinuses. The progression may occur over several days, with worsening severity as the disease advances. Although the most common symptoms involve the ocular and periorbital regions, additional systemic and neurological features may also be present. These include chills, neck stiffness, facial sensory disturbances, altered mental status, and, in more severe cases, seizures, focal neurological deficits resembling stroke, or even coma. Such findings indicate more extensive intracranial involvement and are associated with a poorer clinical prognosis. Physical examination findings in cavernous sinus thrombosis are often striking and reflect both systemic infection and localized venous obstruction. Vital sign abnormalities are common and may include fever, tachycardia, and, in severe cases, hypotension, particularly when systemic infection progresses toward sepsis. A characteristic but not universally observed fever pattern involves rapid spikes in temperature followed by transient normalization, sometimes referred to as a "picket fence" pattern, which may be associated with involvement of the

lateral wall of the cavernous sinus. Neurological assessment frequently reveals varying degrees of altered consciousness, ranging from mild confusion to lethargy or reduced responsiveness. Although seizures and focal neurological deficits are less common, their presence suggests significant intracranial extension of the disease process [14].

Ocular findings are among the most consistent and clinically significant features, occurring in the vast majority of patients. Early in the disease course, periorbital edema is typically unilateral but often becomes bilateral as the condition progresses. Associated findings include erythema of the eyelids, conjunctival edema, and protrusion of the eyeball due to impaired venous drainage from the orbit. Patients frequently experience pain with eye movement, and examination may reveal restricted extraocular movements. Additional findings may include swelling of the optic disc, retinal hemorrhages, and reduced visual acuity, which occurs in a notable proportion of cases. Sensitivity to light and diminished pupillary responses may also be observed. In severe cases, permanent visual loss can occur, reflecting the extent of vascular and neural compromise. Cranial nerve involvement is a hallmark of cavernous sinus thrombosis and contributes significantly to the clinical picture. The abducens nerve is most commonly affected due to its central location within the cavernous sinus, resulting in impaired lateral movement of the eye and the development of diplopia. As the condition progresses, additional cranial nerves may become involved, including the oculomotor and trochlear nerves, leading to more extensive ophthalmoplegia. In advanced cases, complete paralysis of extraocular movements may occur. Internal ophthalmoplegia may also develop, characterized by abnormalities in pupillary function. These changes may present as either constricted pupils due to disruption of sympathetic pathways or dilated pupils resulting from parasympathetic dysfunction involving the oculomotor nerve [14]. The presence of Horner syndrome, which includes ptosis, pupillary constriction, and decreased sweating on the affected side, further reflects involvement of sympathetic fibers within the cavernous sinus. Sensory examination may reveal deficits in the distribution of the trigeminal nerve, particularly its ophthalmic and maxillary branches. Patients may report numbness, tingling, or reduced sensation over the forehead, eye, and midfacial region. A diminished or absent corneal reflex may also be detected, indicating involvement of sensory pathways responsible for corneal innervation. Overall, the findings on history and physical examination provide critical insights into the diagnosis of cavernous sinus thrombosis and reflect the complex interplay between infection, vascular compromise, and neural dysfunction. Early recognition of these features is essential for prompt intervention and improved clinical outcomes [14].

Evaluation

Accurate diagnosis of cavernous sinus thrombosis relies primarily on timely and appropriate imaging, supported by targeted laboratory investigations. Neuroimaging remains the cornerstone of evaluation, as clinical findings alone are insufficient to confirm the diagnosis or determine the extent of disease involvement. Both contrast-enhanced computed tomography and magnetic resonance imaging are widely utilized, with advanced venographic techniques providing the highest diagnostic sensitivity. Computed tomography venography and contrast-enhanced magnetic resonance venography are considered the most reliable imaging modalities, as they allow detailed visualization of venous structures and can directly demonstrate thrombus formation within the cavernous sinus. In contrast, noncontrast computed tomography and time-of-flight magnetic resonance venography are less sensitive and may fail to detect early or subtle changes, limiting their diagnostic utility in this condition. Although noncontrast computed tomography is not the preferred modality for definitive diagnosis, it may reveal indirect or suggestive findings that prompt further evaluation. These findings can include dilation or engorgement of the superior and inferior ophthalmic veins, outward bulging of the lateral margins of the cavernous sinus, and evidence of proptosis. Additional abnormalities may include associated sinus infections, particularly involving the sphenoid or ethmoid sinuses, or the presence of adjacent mass lesions affecting the sphenoid region or pituitary gland. These features, while nonspecific, may raise suspicion for cavernous sinus involvement and necessitate further imaging. In contrast, contrast-enhanced magnetic resonance imaging provides more detailed information, often demonstrating enlargement of the cavernous sinus, abnormal dural enhancement, and absence of normal venous flow voids, which are indicative of thrombosis [15].

Advanced venographic imaging techniques provide a more definitive assessment of the condition. Both computed tomography venography and enhanced magnetic resonance venography can identify characteristic features such as dilation of the cavernous sinus, abnormal enhancement patterns, and a change in the contour of the lateral wall from its normal concave appearance to a convex configuration. These modalities may also reveal heterogeneous filling defects within the sinus following contrast administration, reflecting the presence of thrombus. Additional findings can include increased density or inflammation of the orbital fat, thrombosis of the superior ophthalmic veins, and involvement of smaller venous tributaries. Importantly, these imaging techniques also allow assessment of complications and associated conditions. Findings such as narrowing of the internal carotid artery, enhancement of the arterial wall, cerebral infarction, intracerebral hemorrhage, subdural empyema, meningitis, cerebritis, or brain

abscess may be detected, all of which have significant implications for management and prognosis [16][17][18][19]. Given that multiple venous thromboses may occur simultaneously, comprehensive evaluation of the dural venous sinuses and cerebral veins is essential to avoid underdiagnosis of concurrent pathology [20]. Laboratory investigations play a supportive role in the diagnostic process and help assess the underlying inflammatory and infectious state. Common findings include elevated white blood cell count, increased levels of inflammatory markers such as C-reactive protein and erythrocyte sedimentation rate, and elevated D-dimer levels, reflecting activation of the coagulation system. Blood cultures are a critical component of evaluation and should be obtained routinely, as they are frequently positive and can guide antimicrobial therapy. Assessment for underlying thrombophilic conditions may be considered; however, such testing should be deferred until after completion of anticoagulation therapy, as treatment may interfere with the accuracy of results [16][17].

Lumbar puncture may be indicated in selected cases to exclude central nervous system infections such as meningitis. Cerebrospinal fluid analysis may demonstrate elevated opening pressure and increased white blood cell count, even when cultures are negative. However, this procedure must be performed with caution. Prior neuroimaging is essential to exclude the presence of intracranial mass lesions or significant cerebral edema, as lumbar puncture in such settings may precipitate brain herniation. Overall, a structured approach combining high-resolution imaging and targeted laboratory evaluation is essential for accurate diagnosis and effective management of cavernous sinus thrombosis [20].

Treatment / Management

Cavernous sinus thrombosis is an uncommon yet potentially fatal condition, and its rarity has precluded the development of randomized controlled trials or formalized, universally accepted treatment guidelines. Management is therefore primarily guided by retrospective studies, expert opinion, and extrapolation from related venous thrombotic disorders. The cornerstone of therapy combines aggressive antimicrobial therapy with judicious anticoagulation, aiming to control infection, limit thrombus progression, and prevent secondary complications [21]. Antimicrobial therapy constitutes the first line of treatment, targeting both aerobic and anaerobic pathogens most commonly implicated in septic cases. Empiric regimens typically include anti-staphylococcal coverage, with vancomycin indicated in regions or populations with methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* prevalence. A third-generation cephalosporin is frequently administered for broader coverage of Gram-negative organisms, and metronidazole is added to address anaerobic bacteria, which are frequently involved in infections originating

from paranasal sinuses, the nasolabial triangle, or odontogenic sources. In cases of fungal cavernous sinus thrombosis, particularly in immunocompromised individuals, amphotericin B is the treatment of choice. Treatment duration is extended, often continuing for three to four weeks or at least two weeks beyond the resolution of clinical symptoms, with careful monitoring following cessation of therapy to detect relapse or late complications [21].

Anticoagulation is commonly recommended, provided no strong contraindications exist, with either unfractionated heparin or low-molecular-weight heparin administered for a period ranging from several weeks to months. The rationale for anticoagulation is to prevent propagation of the thrombus, reduce the risk of embolic spread, and potentially enhance antibiotic penetration into the thrombosed sinus. Retrospective analyses suggest that anticoagulation may reduce mortality from approximately 40% to 14% and decrease neurologic morbidity from 61% to 31% when combined with appropriate antimicrobial therapy. Despite these observations, anticoagulation remains controversial due to potential risks, including systemic or intracranial hemorrhage and, theoretically, dissemination of septic emboli. Data from cerebral venous and sinus thrombosis studies suggest that anticoagulation is generally safe, even in the presence of intracranial hemorrhage, and may reduce mortality, though evidence specific to cavernous sinus thrombosis remains limited. Recommendations for anticoagulation duration in cerebral venous thrombosis, as outlined by the European Federation of Neurological Societies, range from three months in cases with transient risk factors to indefinite therapy in patients with recurrent thrombosis or severe thrombophilia, providing a framework for clinical decision-making in cavernous sinus thrombosis. Corticosteroids are sometimes administered in clinical practice to reduce inflammation and edema surrounding cranial nerves and orbital structures, though there is no definitive evidence of efficacy. Steroid therapy is particularly indicated in cases where hypopituitarism has developed due to pituitary involvement. The International Study on Cerebral Veins and Dural Sinus Thrombosis reported corticosteroid use in approximately 24% of cases without demonstrable improvement, highlighting the need for cautious, individualized use [21].

Surgical interventions are reserved for addressing the primary infectious source or secondary complications rather than direct treatment of the cavernous sinus itself. Procedures may include sinus surgeries such as sphenoidectomy, ethmoidectomy, or maxillary antrostomy, mastoidectomy, and abscess drainage. In severe cases, craniotomy for subdural empyema or brain abscess, orbital decompression, or ventricular shunting may be necessary. Patients with fungal etiologies, particularly mucormycosis, often

require extensive debridement of involved paranasal sinuses to control infection and prevent extension into the central nervous system or orbit. Surgical intervention is therefore tailored to the underlying etiology, site of infection, and presence of secondary complications, complementing medical therapy to optimize outcomes. In conclusion, the management of cavernous sinus thrombosis relies on rapid initiation of broad-spectrum antimicrobial therapy, consideration of anticoagulation in the absence of contraindications, and supportive measures tailored to neurologic and systemic complications. Adjunctive corticosteroid therapy and surgical interventions are reserved for selected cases with specific indications. Individualized, multidisciplinary care remains critical, given the complexity of this condition and the significant risk of morbidity and mortality [21].

Prognosis

The clinical outcomes of cavernous sinus thrombosis have improved markedly with advances in early recognition and prompt initiation of therapy. Timely diagnosis hinges on the identification of key presenting features, which typically include fever, headache, periorbital swelling, and ophthalmoplegia involving cranial nerves III, IV, and VI. Recognition of these signs at an early stage allows for rapid commencement of appropriate antimicrobial and supportive therapies, which is critical for improving survival and reducing complications. Historically, cavernous sinus thrombosis carried a near-universal mortality rate, with reports citing figures between 80% and 100%. This high mortality reflected delays in diagnosis, lack of effective antimicrobial therapy, and the severe systemic complications associated with septic propagation [22][23][24]. With contemporary management strategies, including empiric broad-spectrum antibiotics, targeted antimicrobial therapy, and adjunctive measures such as anticoagulation when indicated, the mortality rate has decreased substantially, now estimated at approximately 8% to 13%. Despite these improvements in survival, the condition continues to be associated with significant morbidity. Visual impairment remains a common long-term consequence, affecting fewer than 20% of patients, and is often a result of optic nerve involvement, retinal venous congestion, or persistent orbital edema. Cranial nerve dysfunction is another major source of morbidity, with approximately half of patients exhibiting persistent deficits, predominantly involving the oculomotor (III) and abducens (VI) nerves. These deficits can manifest as persistent ophthalmoplegia, diplopia, or impaired ocular motility, significantly affecting quality of life. Additional long-term sequelae may include residual headache, chronic periorbital edema, and, in rare cases, cerebral ischemic events secondary to vascular compromise. Recovery often depends on the rapidity of therapeutic intervention, the extent of initial thrombotic involvement, and the presence of

comorbidities such as immunosuppression or uncontrolled diabetes. Consequently, early recognition, aggressive antimicrobial therapy, and vigilant monitoring are pivotal not only for reducing mortality but also for minimizing persistent neurologic and visual complications. The prognosis underscores the importance of multidisciplinary management to optimize both acute outcomes and long-term functional recovery [22][23][24].

Conclusion:

Cavernous sinus thrombosis remains a critical neurological emergency requiring high clinical suspicion and rapid intervention to prevent irreversible complications. Despite its rarity, CST poses significant diagnostic and therapeutic challenges due to its variable presentation, rapid progression, and involvement of vital neurovascular structures. Contemporary advances in antimicrobial therapy, anticoagulation strategies, and neuroimaging have substantially reduced mortality from historically catastrophic levels to modern rates near 10%. However, morbidity persists, particularly in the form of long-term visual impairment, cranial nerve deficits, and residual neurological dysfunction. Optimal outcomes depend on early recognition of hallmark symptoms—fever, severe headache, periorbital swelling, and ophthalmoplegia—and immediate initiation of broad-spectrum antibiotics targeting common aerobic and anaerobic pathogens. Anticoagulation, though historically controversial, offers substantial benefit in preventing thrombus propagation and improving recovery when used judiciously. Surgical management remains essential for cases with sinus, orbital, or dental sources requiring drainage or debridement. Given the complexity of CST, a coordinated multidisciplinary approach involving neurology, infectious disease, otolaryngology, ophthalmology, and neurosurgery is crucial. Continued efforts toward standardized protocols, early detection strategies, and improved clinical awareness are necessary to further reduce morbidity and enhance long-term patient outcomes.

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