Intermountain® Healthcare

Intracerebral Hemorrhage (ICH)

What is it?

An **intracerebral hemorrhage (ICH)** is bleeding around or within the brain. Other names for ICH are **cerebral hemorrhage** or **intracranial hemorrhage**.

Intracerebral hemorrhage can cause a type of stroke called a **hemorrhagic stroke.** Each year, about 10% of the strokes in the U.S. are caused by ICH. A **stroke** is when part of your brain doesn't get enough blood, so brain cells don't get the oxygen they need. Stroke is the leading cause of disability and the fourth-leading cause of death in the United States.

What are the symptoms?

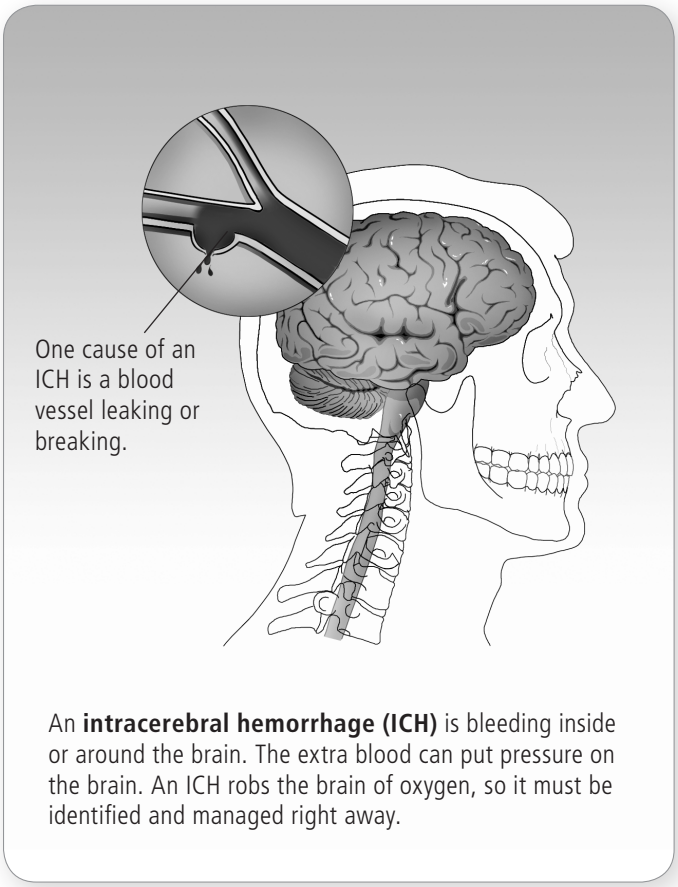
Symptoms of an ICH usually develop suddenly, without warning. Symptoms can include:

- Severe headache with no known cause (patients often describe it as "the worst headache of my life")
- Numbness or weakness of the face, arm or leg — especially on one side of the body
- Partial or total loss of consciousness
- Difficulty speaking, understanding speech, writing, or reading
- Vision changes, including double vision or loss of vision in one or both eyes
- Seizures
- Vomiting or severe nausea, when combined with other symptoms from the list above

What causes it?

An ICH is often caused by a **blood vessel leaking or breaking.** This can be the result of:

- High blood pressure that has damaged a blood vessel
- A **cerebral aneurysm** — a weak spot in a blood vessel wall that balloons out and bursts
- Malformation in an artery or vein, also called **arteriovenous malformation** or **AVM**
- Blockage from a blood clot
- Smoking, overuse of alcohol, or use of illegal drugs such as cocaine



An **intracerebral hemorrhage (ICH)** is bleeding inside or around the brain. The extra blood can put pressure on the brain. An ICH robs the brain of oxygen, so it must be identified and managed right away.

An ICH can also be caused by:

- Anticoagulant therapy (treatment with blood thinners)
- A brain tumor that bleeds
- Head injuries caused by a fall or accident
- Various diseases
- Conditions related to pregnancy or childbirth

How is it diagnosed?

Your doctor will explain what tests will be used to diagnose ICH, depending on your condition. Tests may include a neurological (brain/nerve) exam, blood tests, and imaging tests of the brain.

How is it treated?

Your doctor will explain how the ICH will be treated. The best treatment depends on your condition.

Immediate treatments may include:

- Medications to control blood pressure, swelling, seizures, pain, or other symptoms
- Surgery to relieve pressure on the brain
- Surgery to repair blood vessel problems

Depending on the treatment you need and the services available at your hospital, you might need to be transferred to a different hospital where more specialized equipment or a neurosurgeon (a doctor who specializes in nerve and brain problems) is available.

Long-term treatments may be needed to help you recover and regain the functions needed for daily living. Whether you need long-term treatment — and the type of treatment you'll have — will depend on how the ICH has affected your brain.

Notes

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