

Cavernoma (Cavernous Malformation)

Understanding the Condition — And When to Seek Help

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I often meet patients who have been told they have a “**cavernoma**” after a brain scan — and understandably, they feel worried and unsure what it means.

If you've landed on this page, you're likely looking for answers. Let me walk you through this in a simple, clear way.

What Is a Cavernoma?

A **cavernoma** (also called a cavernous malformation) is a cluster of abnormal blood vessels in the brain or spinal cord.

Instead of normal, strong blood vessels, these vessels are:

- Thin-walled
- Fragile
- Prone to small leaks

You can think of it like a **small “berry-like” cluster of blood vessels**.

Important to understand:

- It is **not a cancer**
- It is **not a tumour that spreads**
- Many people live with it without ever knowing

However, in some cases, it can cause symptoms — especially if it bleeds or presses on surrounding brain tissue.

Symptoms to Watch For

Many cavernomas are discovered **incidentally** — meaning during scans done for something else.

But when symptoms occur, they usually depend on:

- The location of the cavernoma
- Whether there has been bleeding

Here are the common symptoms to be aware of:

1. Headaches

- Persistent or unusual headaches
- Different from your usual migraine or tension headache
- Sometimes worsening over time

2. Seizures (Fits)

- Sudden jerking movements
- Loss of awareness
- Episodes of “blank staring”

For some patients, a cavernoma is only discovered **after a first seizure**.

3. Weakness or Numbness

- Weakness in the arm or leg
- Numbness or tingling
- Difficulty with coordination

4. Speech or Vision Problems

- Slurred speech
- Difficulty finding words
- Blurred or double vision

5. Balance Issues

- Feeling unsteady
- Difficulty walking

6. Sudden Neurological Changes

This is important.

If a cavernoma bleeds, symptoms may appear suddenly:

- Sudden severe headache
- Sudden weakness
- Sudden confusion

When Should You See a Neurosurgeon?

Not every cavernoma needs surgery.

But **every cavernoma deserves proper evaluation**.

You should seek a neurosurgical opinion if:

You have symptoms

- Seizures
- Weakness
- Speech or vision changes

You were told you have a cavernoma on MRI

Even if you feel well, you need:

- Proper interpretation of the scan
- Risk assessment
- A long-term plan

Your symptoms are worsening

- Increasing headaches
- Recurrent seizures
- Progressive weakness

There is concern about bleeding

Especially if you were told:

- “There may have been a small bleed”
- “There are changes on MRI”

How Is a Cavernoma Diagnosed?

The main test used is:

MRI Scan (Magnetic Resonance Imaging)

This is the **best way** to detect cavernomas.

It shows:

- The exact location
- Whether there has been bleeding
- Any surrounding effects on the brain

Sometimes, additional scans may be done to:

- Confirm the diagnosis
- Rule out other conditions

How Is a Cavernoma Treated?

This is the most important question patients ask:

“Do I need surgery?”

The answer is:

👉 *Not always.*

Treatment depends on:

- Your symptoms
- The location of the cavernoma
- Whether it has bled
- Your overall health

Let's break it down clearly.

1. Observation (Monitoring)

If:

- You have no symptoms
- The cavernoma was found incidentally
- There is no sign of bleeding

Then the safest approach may be:

- ✓ Regular follow-up
- ✓ Repeat MRI scans
- ✓ Monitoring for new symptoms

Many patients live safely with this approach.

2. Medication

If you have seizures:

- ✓ Anti-seizure medications may be prescribed

This can:

- Control symptoms
- Reduce risk of further episodes

3. Surgery

Surgery may be recommended if:

- You have repeated bleeding
- You have seizures that are not well controlled
- The cavernoma is causing neurological problems
- It is in a location where surgery is safe and beneficial

What does surgery involve?

- Removing the cavernoma completely
- Protecting surrounding brain tissue
- Using modern microsurgical techniques

Key reassurance:

With today's advances:

- Surgery is **precise and targeted**
- We aim to **minimise risk**
- Recovery is often smoother than patients expect

4. Individualised Decision-Making

There is no “one-size-fits-all” approach.

Every cavernoma is different.

That's why a careful discussion is essential:

- Risks vs benefits
- Timing of treatment
- Your lifestyle and concerns

Why Choose a Specialist?

When it comes to brain conditions, experience matters.

A cavernoma may sound simple — but **the decision-making is not.**

Choosing a specialist ensures:

1. Accurate Diagnosis

Not all brain lesions are the same.

You need:

- Clear interpretation of MRI
- Confidence in the diagnosis

2. Proper Risk Assessment

Key questions include:

- Is it likely to bleed?
- Is it in a high-risk location?
- Should we monitor or intervene?

3. Safe Surgical Planning (If Needed)

Brain surgery requires:

- Precision
- Experience
- Advanced techniques

As a neurosurgeon with experience in:

- Brain tumours
- Skull base surgery
- Complex brain conditions

I focus on:

- ✓ Safety
- ✓ Minimising risk
- ✓ Preserving quality of life

4. Reassurance and Clarity

One of the biggest concerns patients have is uncertainty.

My role is to help you:

- Understand your condition
- Feel reassured
- Make informed decisions

Living With a Cavernoma

Many patients ask:

“Can I live a normal life?”

In many cases, the answer is **yes**.

With proper guidance:

- You can continue your daily activities
- You can be safely monitored
- You can act early if symptoms change

The key is:

👉 *Being informed and followed up properly*

Frequently Asked Concerns

“Is this a brain tumour?”

No — a cavernoma is not a cancer and does not spread.

“Will it definitely bleed?”

Not all cavernomas bleed. Many remain stable.

“Do I need immediate surgery?”

Most patients do not require urgent surgery unless there are significant symptoms.

“Is it dangerous?”

It depends on the location and behaviour — which is why proper evaluation is essential.

When Not to Wait

Seek urgent medical attention if you experience:

- Sudden severe headache
- New weakness
- Difficulty speaking
- Seizure

Early evaluation can make a significant difference.

Being told you have something in the brain is frightening.

That's completely understandable.

But here's what I want you to remember:

- ✓ Many cavernomas are manageable
- ✓ Not all require surgery
- ✓ You have options
- ✓ You are not alone in this

Take the Next Step


If you have been diagnosed with a cavernoma or are experiencing symptoms the most important step is **getting the right advice early**.

A proper consultation can:


- Clarify your diagnosis
- Reduce uncertainty
- Give you a clear plan moving forward

Book a Consultation

If you would like a personalised assessment:

 **Dr. Ravindran Karuppiah**
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-  **Subang Jaya Medical Centre**
-  **ParkCity Medical Centre**
-  **Columbia Asia Hospital Setapak**

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Don't wait and worry in uncertainty.

Let's review your scan, understand your condition, and guide you safely forward.