Kid Be a Kid Again

spinal cord. “When I researched online, her symptoms were textbook,” Doreen says. With Chiari malformation, the pressure on the brain and brain stem can cause head and neck pain, muscle weakness, numbness, vision problems, ringing in the ears, and more. Her doctor referred them to Roopal Karia, M.D., a pediatric neurologist at K. Hovnanian Children’s Hospital at Jersey Shore University Medical Center, part of Meridian Pediatric Network.

Some patients with Chiari malformation type 1 have no symptoms and may never know they have the condition. But after examining Melanie and taking into account the fact that her symptoms were interfering with her life, Dr. Karia referred them to Thomas Steineke, M.D., Ph.D., a pediatric neurosurgeon at K. Hovnanian Children’s Hospital and part of Meridian Pediatric Network.

“I did a lot of research about pediatric neurosurgeons and was even willing to travel, if needed, to make sure Melanie received the best care possible,” Doreen says. “But even the neurosurgeon we went to for a second opinion said Dr. Steineke was the one for this surgery.”

Melanie was 13 years old when she had the operation. “During the surgery, I removed a small area of bone from the back of Melanie’s skull to relieve the pressure and give the brain an appropriate amount of room,” Dr. Steineke says. He opened the covering of the brain called the dura.

With tissue taken from the back of Melanie’s head, just above the incision, Dr. Steineke created a permanent patch to protect the brain and prevent any leaks. The procedure lasted about four hours.

“He didn’t even have to shave Melanie’s hair,” Doreen says. “He knew it would be traumatic for a 13-year-old girl to have to shave her head. I was so touched that he even considered that.”

Expert Care Close to Home

Even before leaving the hospital about five days after the surgery, Melanie said she already felt less pressure in her head.

“The surgery has had such a positive impact on Melanie’s life,” Doreen says. “She’s doing well in school, and she’s able to run cross-country — whereas before she was in too much pain to play any sports. When your child is sick, you want to do everything you can to get the best care, and it was such a blessing to have the level of care I was looking for right where we live.”

Is Your Handbag a Drag?

How often does this happen to you: You get to your car only to spend several minutes digging through your purse trying to find your keys? A clutch may be cute and convenient, but most women require a heftier bag to haul everything they need, from money and makeup to bottles and baby clothes.

Unfortunately, all those items can really weigh you down. And a heavy or improperly positioned bag can pinch the nerves in your neck, restrict blood flow to your shoulders and arms, cause lower back pain, and even affect your balance.

“When choosing a purse, make sure you pick one that’s right for the job,” says Jessy Joykuty, M.D., of Riverview Medical Center. “A smaller cross-body purse that has only the essentials is great for short errands, while a backpack, messenger bag, or diaper bag with shoulder padding is better for longer trips.”

Your bag’s material can make a difference, too. Microfiber or fabric handbags weigh much less than big leather ones, allowing you to carry more items with greater ease. Ideally, your purse should weigh less than 15 percent of your body weight.

Try to avoid tote-style bags that place heavy loads on just one shoulder. You can also place longer straps over the opposite shoulder. This will more evenly distribute the weight across your back.

FASHION TIPS FOR BUSY MOMS

Meridian Momtourage blogger and personal stylist Carly Walko writes about the eight fashion must-haves that can spice up a mom-friendly wardrobe. Visit MeridanMomtourage.com to read her tips.