

Hirschsprung's Disease

What is Hirschsprung's disease?

Hirschsprung's disease is a disorder that occurs when **ganglia (nerve cells)** are missing from the **large intestine (or colon)**. Normally, the intestines are lined with ganglia that help move waste by **peristalsis** (wave-like muscle contractions).

Children with Hirschsprung's disease have a portion of the colon where the nerve cells are absent. Because the nerve cells are missing, waste cannot pass through the intestines and a blockage occurs. As the blockage builds up, the colon enlarges; this is called **congenital** (present at birth) **megacolon** (enlarged colon).



What causes Hirschsprung's disease?

Currently, the exact reason why children with Hirschsprung's disease are missing ganglia is not known. Hirschsprung's disease can be **familial**, meaning that multiple family members may be born with Hirschsprung's disease. Hirschsprung's disease can be also associated with other birth defects, including genetic conditions. If your child has Hirschsprung's disease, his or her doctor(s) will do a thorough examination to identify any other birth defects that may be present.

How is Hirschsprung's disease treated?

Hirschsprung's disease can be corrected by surgically removing the portion of the colon that is missing ganglia. Your child's doctor(s) will discuss appropriate treatment options with you.

For more information

Cleveland Clinic Foundation - <http://www.clevelandclinic.org/health/health-info/docs/1200/1224.asp?index=5972&src=news>

MedlinePlus Medical Encyclopedia - <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/article/001140.htm>

National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (NIDDK) - http://digestive.niddk.nih.gov/ddiseases/pubs/hirschsprungs_ez/

Sources: MedlinePlus Medical Encyclopedia, NIDDK