

Your GOOD HEALTH

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Me in hospital

Bernadette thought she'd strained herself. But why did her symptoms worsen when she stood up?

PAIN in the NECK

**Bernadette Hard, 53,
Caerphilly**

Sitting at my desk, I put my head in my hands and sighed.

I was staying in Malta on a work trip for a medical conference, and had been under intense stress lately.

But suddenly, I felt a jolt in the back of my neck on the left-hand side.

Maybe I've cricked it, I thought.

But a dull, heavy pain reverberated through my head.

I tried to get an early night to sleep it off, but the following morning, it only felt worse.

As I stood up, the intense sensation returned.

It felt like my head was going to explode.

As I stumbled to the chemist next door, waves of nausea hit me. I ran to their toilet to throw up, before I collapsed on the floor.

The next thing I knew, I was waking up in hospital.

'What happened?' I asked, confused.

The pharmacist had called me an ambulance after being sick.

My husband, Jake, was on a flight over.

But they weren't sure what had caused my symptoms. As

a doctor myself, I tried to think what could be causing this.

I wondered if I'd suffered a brain haemorrhage.

But following a blood test and a CT scan, the results didn't find anything.

The strange thing was, when I laid down on the hospital bed, I was fine.

But when I stood up, the intense pain returned.

I was referred to a neurology specialist for further examination. He carried out a lumbar puncture on my lower back to collect cerebrospinal fluid.

The results showed that the pressure of the fluid surrounding my brain and spinal cord was abnormally low.

After an MRI scan, the doctor finally had a diagnosis for me.

'You've suffered a cerebrospinal fluid leak,' he explained.

It was a medical condition caused by a small tear in the outer membrane, which surrounded and protected the spinal cord and brain.

'When the fluid leaks out, the pressure inside the skull drops,' he explained.

With less fluid inside, the cushioning effect

was reduced and caused the brain to slump.

That explained why my symptoms worsened every time I stood up.

Other side effects included blurred vision, eye and neck pain, and hearing impairment.

But they were unsure where exactly the hole was or what had caused it.

I was told in the meantime to stay hydrated, lie down when possible and avoid painkillers which can make the pain worse in the long term.

Jake was by my side and, after almost a month in Malta, I was allowed to fly home.

But I was still suffering and struggling to lead a normal life.

I had appointment after appointment, but my GP hadn't even heard of a cerebrospinal fluid leak and none of the doctors locally were specialists.

So, I had to travel to London to meet one of the UK's

leading experts in the condition.

We came up with a plan to manage my symptoms, then I underwent a myelogram to examine the spinal cord.

Doctors found a hole the size of a button towards the front of my spine.

I was taken down to the operating theatre where surgeons had to go in through the back, through the skin and muscle to create a bone window.

He then looked down an operating microscope and put in four metal clips to successfully seal the leak.

After 10 days recovering in hospital, my side effects disappeared.

It was like a weight had been lifted.

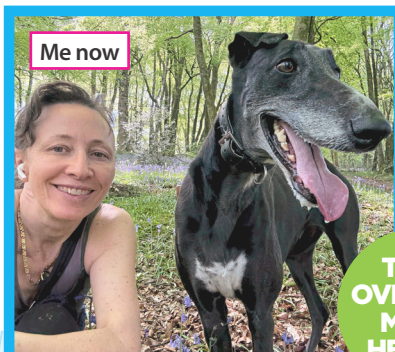
This condition is often misdiagnosed and if left untreated can lead to complications, such as brain bleeds and even dementia.

Now, I spend time raising awareness with the CSF Leak Association.

My son, Callum, even made a documentary about my health journey for a university project.

I was lucky to spot my CSF leak when I did – I want others to recognise the signs before it's too late to fix.

● To find out more, visit csfleak.uk



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