Spontaneous rupture of intracranial dermoid cyst in a child

A 17-year-old girl was diagnosed at age 3 with a suprasellar dermoid cyst following complaints of headaches. At 15, headache worsened, with nausea, vomiting, and confusion. Headache was sudden, severe, and pressure-like. Repeat brain MRI showed rupture of the dermoid cyst into the subarachnoid space (figures 1 and 2).

Rupture of dermoid cysts is rare and usually spontaneous, although trauma-related rupture may occur. The hypothesized mechanism of rupture is rapid enlargement of the cyst due to age-dependent hormonal changes. The presenting clinical features of rupture can vary from none to headache, seizures, chemical meningitis, cerebral ischemia with motor, sensory, or visual deficits, and hydrocephalus.

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