

Bulbar edema

Bulbar edema refers to swelling in the **brainstem**, specifically the **medulla oblongata** (also known as the “bulb”), which controls vital functions such as breathing, heart rate, and blood pressure. Bulbar edema is a serious condition that can result from trauma, increased intracranial pressure, infections, tumors, or other insults to the brain.

Symptoms may include:

- Difficulty breathing (respiratory distress)
- Weakness or paralysis of the face, tongue, or throat muscles (leading to swallowing and speech difficulties)
- Altered consciousness
- Abnormal heart rate or blood pressure
- Gag reflex changes

Given the involvement of critical functions, bulbar edema is considered a medical **emergency** and requires immediate intervention to reduce swelling and prevent brainstem compression.

Treatment may involve:

- Medications to reduce brain swelling (e.g., corticosteroids like dexamethasone)
- Surgical interventions in cases where the cause is structural, such as tumor removal or drainage of fluid
- Supportive care such as ventilation if respiratory function is compromised

Case reports

Bulbar **edema** complicating surgery for **Chiari malformation** ¹⁾.

¹⁾

Urbaneja A, Gimeno D, Velasquez C, Martin R, Lopez Gomez P. Bulbar oedema complicating surgery for Chiari malformation. Pract Neurol. 2024 Sep 4;pn-2024-004245. doi: 10.1136/pn-2024-004245. Epub ahead of print. PMID: 39237148.

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