A brain arteriovenous malformation, or AVM, is a tangle of weakened blood vessels connecting arteries and veins, which is often described as a bowl of spaghetti. AVMs can cause severe headaches, seizures and, in some cases, a rupture.

“Dr. Bendok on camera
Bernard Bendok, M.D. Neurosurgery Mayo Clinic
“So, what an AVM does is it exposes those veins to a much higher pressure, and that leads to the veins getting sick essentially.”

Mayo Clinic, Neurosurgeon Dr. Bernard Bendok says AVMs only occur in about 1 in every 700 people. While they’re not real common, they can be dangerous.

“Dr. Bendok on camera
Dr. Bendok says there are several treatments available to patients, including microsurgery, embolization, where glue is injected to close the abnormal vessels, and radiosurgery. As treatments advance, the outlook for people with AVMs is positive.

“Dr. Bendok on camera: Dr. Bendok in surgery
Dr. Bendok in surgery
“AVMs can occur anywhere. But when they occur in the brain, the consequences can be more severe.

So, AVMs can sit quietly for many years without symptoms, and in a fairly unpredictable way, cause a brain hemorrhage.

“Dr. Bendok on camera: Dr. Bendok in surgery
For the Mayo Clinic News Network, I’m Ian Roth