Often one is confronted with an extracerebral fluid collection/effusion when interpreting computed tomography (CT) of the brain in children. To determine whether the effusion is subarachnoid or subdural, a few basic principles should be kept in mind.

Subdural effusions are crescent-shaped, especially over the frontal and parietal lobes, with the vessels ‘pasted’ against the cerebral surface (Fig. 1). The interhemispheric fissure anteriorly can be V-shaped or asymmetrical, as the hemisphere is displaced away from the falx at an angle (Figs 2a and b). Subarachnoid effusions emphasise the gyral outlines as the subarachnoid spaces enlarge, especially over the...
frontal lobes and interhemispheric fissure when the patient lies supine (Fig. 3). It is important to note symmetry of the subarachnoid effusion.\(^2\)

Clinical relevance of this determination is in the evaluation of collections in non-accidental injury (which are often hypodense – indicating chronic effusions). This is also important in pyogenic meningitides with subdural collections,\(^3\) where these must be distinguished from the normal subarachnoid spaces in infants less than 1 year of age.\(^2\)