

Brain Tumor

What is a brain tumor?

A brain tumor begins when healthy cells in the brain change and grow uncontrollably, forming a mass. A primary brain tumor is a tumor that starts in the brain. A brain tumor can be low grade, which means it is growing slowly and usually is not cancerous, or high grade, which means it is more likely to grow quickly.

What are the parts and function of the brain?

The brain is made up of four parts: the cerebrum, which is divided into four lobes that control specific bodily functions; the cerebellum, which is located beneath the cerebrum and controls coordination and balance; the brain stem, which connects to the spinal cord and controls involuntary functions, such as heartbeat and breathing; and the meninges, which are the membranes that surround and protect the brain and spinal cord.

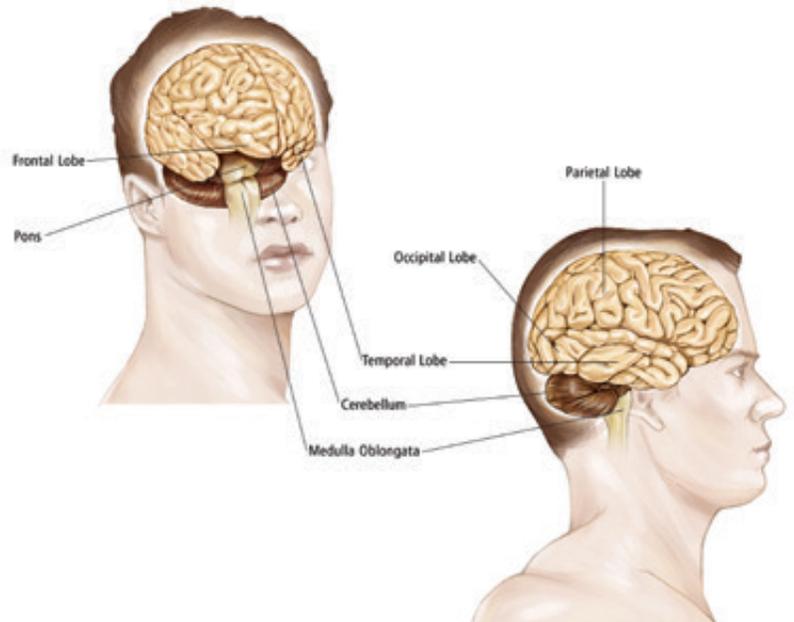


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Are there different types of brain tumors?

There are many types of primary brain tumors. Once a person is diagnosed with a brain tumor, doctors will perform several tests to learn as much about it as possible. Factors that help doctors plan the best treatment and determine a patient's prognosis include the location and grade of the tumor, among others. Learn more at www.cancer.net/brain.

How is a brain tumor treated?

The treatment of a brain tumor depends on the size, type, and grade of the tumor, whether it is putting pressure on vital parts of the brain, whether it has spread to other parts of the central nervous system, possible side effects, and the patient's preferences and overall health. The treatment options include surgery, radiation therapy, chemotherapy, and targeted therapy. Typically, treatment begins with surgery, followed by radiation therapy and then chemotherapy/targeted therapy with a single drug or a combination of drugs. In addition to removing or reducing the size of the brain tumor, the surgeon may collect a tissue sample for analysis. For some tumor types, these results help indicate whether chemotherapy or radiation therapy will be effective. The goals of chemotherapy and radiation therapy are to treat any tumor that remains after surgery, slow the tumor's growth, and reduce symptoms. When making treatment decisions, people may also consider a clinical trial; talk with your doctor about all treatment options. The side effects of brain tumor treatment can often be prevented or managed with the help of your health care team. This is called supportive care and is an important part of the overall treatment plan.

How can I cope with a brain tumor?

Absorbing the news of a brain tumor diagnosis and communicating with your health care team are key parts of the coping process. Seeking support, organizing your health information, making sure all of your questions are answered, and participating in the decision-making process are other steps. Talk with your health care team about any concerns. Understanding your emotions and those of people close to you can be helpful in managing the diagnosis, treatment, and healing process.

Questions to ask the doctor

Regular communication is important in making informed decisions about your health care. Consider asking the following questions of your health care team:

- What type of brain tumor do I have? Is it cancerous?
- Can you explain my pathology report (laboratory test results) to me?
- What grade is the brain tumor? What does this mean?
- Would you explain my treatment options? What clinical trials are open to me?
- What treatment plan do you recommend? Why?
- What is the goal of each treatment? Is it to eliminate the tumor, help me feel better, or both?
- Who will be part of my treatment team, and what does each member do?
- What supportive care will be given to help control my symptoms and side effects?
- How will this treatment affect my daily life? Will I be able to work, exercise, and perform my usual activities?
- What level of caregiving will I need during treatment and recovery?
- Will this treatment affect my ability to become pregnant or have children?
- What long-term side effects may be associated with my treatment?
- If I'm worried about managing the costs related to my cancer care, who can help me with these concerns?
- Where can I find emotional support for me and my family?
- Whom should I call for questions or problems?

Additional questions to ask the doctor can be found at www.cancer.net/brain.

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TERMS TO KNOW

Biopsy:

Removal of a tissue sample that is then examined under a microscope to identify and diagnose disease

Chemotherapy:

The use of drugs to destroy tumor cells

Grade:

A description of how much tumor cells look like healthy cells when viewed under a microscope

Lumbar puncture (spinal tap):

Procedure in which a doctor removes and analyzes a sample of cerebrospinal fluid, which flows around the brain and spinal cord

Neurologist:

A doctor who specializes in problems of the brain and central nervous system

Oncologist:

A doctor who specializes in treating tumors

Prognosis:

Chance of recovery

Radiation therapy:

The use of high-energy x-rays to destroy tumor cells

Targeted therapy:

Treatment that targets specific genes or proteins that contribute to tumor growth

Tumor:

An abnormal growth of body tissue

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