

ASCO ANSWERS

BRAIN TUMOR

WHAT IS A BRAIN TUMOR?

A brain tumor begins when cells in the central nervous system (brain and spinal cord) grow without control and form a mass of cells called a tumor. A primary brain tumor is a tumor that starts in the brain. The most common type of brain tumor is a glioma, which grows from a supportive cell in the brain called a glial cell. A brain tumor can be benign or malignant.

WHAT ARE THE PARTS AND FUNCTION OF THE BRAIN?

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

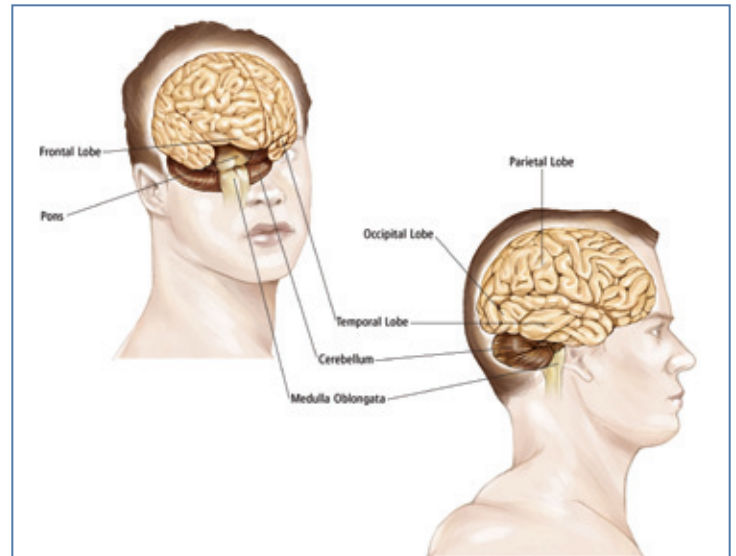


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Find additional information at www.cancer.net.

ARE THERE DIFFERENT TYPES OF BRAIN TUMORS?

There are more than 100 types of primary brain tumors. Once a brain tumor has been diagnosed, doctors will perform several tests to learn as much about the brain tumor as possible. Factors that help doctors plan the best treatment and determine a patient's prognosis include how the tumor cells look under a microscope and the tumor's location, among others.

HOW IS A BRAIN TUMOR TREATED?

The treatment of a brain tumor depends on the size and location of the tumor, whether the tumor is cancerous, whether the cancer has spread, and the person's overall health. The three main treatment options are surgery, radiation therapy, and chemotherapy. Typically, treatment begins with surgery, followed by radiation therapy, and then chemotherapy with a single drug or a combination of drugs. Surgery is the most common type of treatment for a brain tumor. 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, the results of the analysis may help in showing if chemotherapy or radiation therapy will be effective. The goal of chemotherapy and radiation therapy is to treat any tumor that is remaining after surgery, slow the tumor's growth, or 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. Supportive care improves a patient's quality of life and is an important part of treating a person with a brain tumor.

HOW CAN I COPE WITH A BRAIN TUMOR?

Absorbing the news of a brain tumor diagnosis and communicating with your doctor are key parts of the coping process. Seeking support, becoming organized, and considering a second opinion are other steps. Take care of yourself during this time. 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 doctors:

- 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?
- How will this treatment benefit me?
- What supportive care will be given to help control my symptoms or 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?
- If I'm worried about the cost related to my cancer care, who can help me with these concerns?
- Will this treatment affect my ability to become pregnant or have children?
- What long-term side effects may be associated with my cancer treatment?
- Where can I find emotional support for me and my family?
- Whom do I call for questions or problems?
- Is there anything else I should be asking?

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

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www.cancer.net, or call 888-651-3038.**

Cancer.Net 

Doctor-Approved Patient Information from ASCO®

TERMS TO KNOW

Benign:

A tumor that is not cancerous

Biopsy:

Removal of a tissue sample that is then examined under a microscope to check for cancer cells

Chemotherapy:

The use of drugs to destroy cancer cells

Craniotomy:

The opening of part of the skull during surgery

Lumbar puncture (spinal tap):

Procedure where a doctor removes and analyzes a sample of cerebrospinal fluid (fluid that flows around the brain and spinal cord)

Lymph node:

A tiny, bean-shaped organ that fights infection

Malignant:

A tumor that is cancerous

Metastasis:

The spread of cancer from where the cancer began to another part of the body

Oncologist:

A doctor who specializes in treating people with cancer

Prognosis:

Chance of recovery

Radiation therapy:

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

Tumor:

A mass of tissue that requires a biopsy