

[Adrenal Gland Tumor - Introduction](#) [1]

This section has been reviewed and approved by the [Cancer.Net Editorial Board](#) [2], 03/2016

ON THIS PAGE: You will find some basic information about this type of tumor and the parts of the body they may affect. This is the first page of Cancer.Net's Guide to Adrenal Gland Tumor. To see other pages, use the menu. Think of that menu as a roadmap to this full guide.

About the adrenal glands

Each person has 2 adrenal glands. One is on top of each kidney. The body has 2 kidneys. The adrenal glands are small, yellowish in color, and normally weigh about 10 grams. These glands are important to the body's endocrine system. The endocrine system is made up of tissues and organs that produce hormones. Hormones are chemical substances that are carried through the bloodstream to have a specific effect on the activity of other organs or cells in the body.

Each adrenal gland has 2 main parts that function separately:

- **Adrenal cortex.** The outer part of the adrenal gland is called the cortex. The adrenal cortex makes 3 main hormones: cortisol, aldosterone, and dehydroepiandrosterone (DHEA). These hormones carefully control metabolism, blood pressure, and body features, such as hair growth and body shape.
- **Adrenal medulla.** The inner part of the adrenal glands is called the medulla. The adrenal medulla makes 3 hormones: epinephrine, norepinephrine, and dopamine. These hormones, often called catecholamines, control the body's responses to stress, including the "fight or flight" adrenaline surge.

About adrenal gland tumors

A tumor begins when healthy cells change and grow out of control, forming a mass. A tumor can be cancerous or benign. A cancerous tumor is malignant, meaning it can grow and spread to other parts of the body. A benign tumor means the tumor can grow but will not spread.

An adrenal gland tumor can sometimes produce too much of a hormone. When it does, the tumor is called a “functioning tumor.” An adrenal gland tumor that does not produce hormones is called a “nonfunctioning tumor.” The symptoms and treatment of an adrenal gland tumor depend on:

- Whether the tumor is functioning or nonfunctioning
- Which hormone(s) is produced in excess
- Whether the tumor started in the adrenal gland or spread from another organ

Functional adrenal gland tumors may produce any hormone made in the adrenal gland. In rare cases, they may produce more than 1 hormone.

This section focuses on primary adrenal gland tumors. A primary adrenal gland tumor starts in an adrenal gland. An adrenal gland tumor may also result from a cancer that began in another organ, such as the lungs, and then spread to the adrenal gland through a process called metastasis. Primary adrenal gland tumors include the following:

- **Adenoma.** This is the most common type of adrenal gland tumor. It is a noncancerous, nonfunctioning tumor of the adrenal cortex. An adenoma usually does not cause symptoms and, if it is small, often does not need treatment. Adenoma is also called an adrenocortical adenoma,
- **Adrenocortical carcinoma.** Adrenocortical carcinoma is rare. However, it is the most common type of cancerous adrenal gland tumor. It is also known as adrenal cortical carcinoma. Approximately 4 to 12 out of 1 million people develop this type of tumor, which begins in the adrenal cortex. Adrenocortical carcinoma can be a functioning or nonfunctioning tumor. If the tumor is functioning, it may produce more than 1 hormone.
- **Neuroblastoma.** This is a type of childhood cancer that can begin in the adrenal medulla. Learn more about [childhood neuroblastoma](#) [3].

- **Pheochromocytoma.** This type of neuroendocrine tumor most often begins in the adrenal medulla. Learn more about [neuroendocrine tumors](#). [4]

The [next section in this guide is Statistics](#) [5]. It helps explain how many people are diagnosed with this type of tumor and general survival rates. Or, use the menu to choose another section to continue reading this guide.

Links

[1] <http://www.cancer.net/cancer-types/adrenal-gland-tumor/introduction>

[2] <http://www.cancer.net/about-us>

[3] <http://www.cancer.net/node/31395>

[4] <http://www.cancer.net/node/31394>

[5] <http://www.cancer.net/node/18425>