Adrenal Gland Tumor

This section has been reviewed and approved by the Cancer.Net Editorial Board [1], April / 2014

Overview

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

About the adrenal glands

Each person has two adrenal glands; one located on top of each of the body?s two kidneys. These glands are important to the body?s endocrine (hormonal) system. Each adrenal gland has two main parts that function separately:

Adrenal cortex. The outer part of the adrenal gland is called the cortex. The adrenal cortex makes three main hormones: cortisol, aldosterone, and dehydroepiandrosterone (DHEA). These hormones carefully control metabolism and body characteristics, such as hair growth and body shape.

Adrenal medulla. The gland?s inner part is called the medulla. The adrenal medulla makes three other hormones: epinephrine, norepinephrine, and dopamine. These hormones control the body?s responses to stress, including the ?fight or flight? adrenaline surge.

Types of adrenal gland tumors

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

A tumor can start in an adrenal gland, called a primary adrenal tumor, or it can begin in another organ, such as the lungs, and then spread to the adrenal glands. An adrenal gland tumor can sometimes overproduce hormones. 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, what hormone(s) is overproduced, and whether the tumor is a primary adrenal gland tumor or if the cancer has spread from another organ.

This section focuses on primary adrenal gland tumors, which include the following:

Adenoma. Also called an adrenocortical 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.

Adrenocortical carcinoma. Although rare, adrenocortical carcinoma is the most common type of cancerous adrenal gland tumor. It is also known as adrenal cortical carcinoma. Approximately four to 12 out of one 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 one hormone.

Neuroblastoma. This is a type of childhood cancer that can begin in the adrenal medulla. Learn more about childhood neuroblastoma [2].

Pheochromocytoma. This type of neuroendocrine tumor most often begins in the adrenal medulla. Learn more about pheochromocytoma [3].

To continue reading this guide, use the menu on the side of your screen to select another section.

Links:
[1] http://www.cancer.net/about-us
[2] http://www.cancer.net/node/19423
[3] http://www.cancer.net/node/19437