

## **[Astrocytoma - Childhood - 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 disease and the parts of the body it may affect. This is the first page of Cancer.Net's Guide to Childhood Astrocytoma. To see other pages, use the menu. Think of that menu as a roadmap to this full guide.

The brain and spinal column make up the central nervous system (CNS). The CNS controls all vital functions of the body, including thought, speech, and strength.

Astrocytoma is a type of [CNS tumor](#) [3] that forms in cells called astrocytes. Healthy astrocytes provide the connecting network of the brain and spinal cord. When the CNS is damaged, astrocytes form scar tissue. Astrocytoma begins when healthy astrocytes change and grow out of control, forming a mass called a tumor.

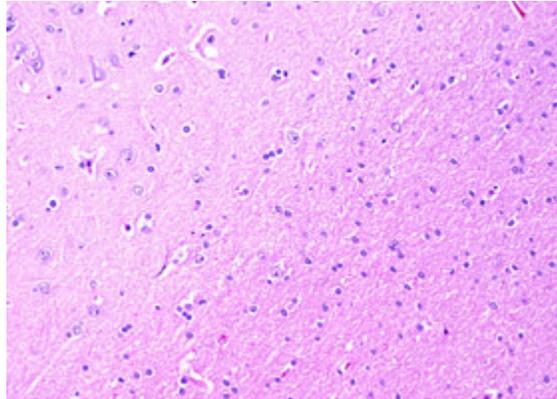
Astrocytoma can occur throughout the CNS, including in the following places:

- The cerebellum, which is the back part of the brain responsible for coordination and balance.
- The cerebrum, which is the top part of the brain that controls motor activities and talking
- The diencephalon or the central part of the brain that controls vision, hormone production, and arm and leg movement
- The brain stem, which controls eye and facial movement, arm and leg movement, and

breathing

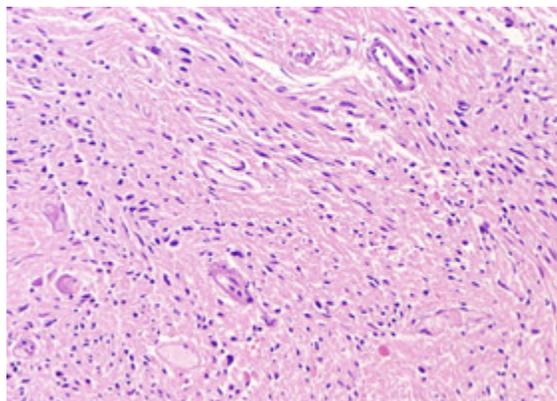
- The spinal cord, which controls sensation and arm and leg motor function

In general, 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. Astrocytoma is more commonly referred to as either high grade or low grade (see [Stages and Grades](#) [4]).



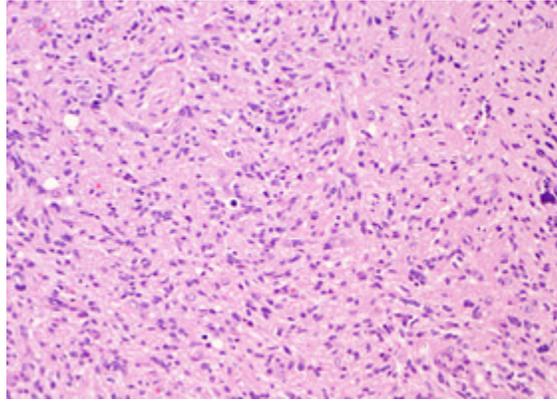
Normal brain tissue

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Pilocytic astrocytoma

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Anaplastic astrocytoma

[Click to Enlarge](#)

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This section covers astrocytoma diagnosed in children; learn more about [brain tumors in adults](#) [5].

## Looking for More of an Introduction?

If you would like more of an introduction, explore these related items. Please note these links will take you to other sections on Cancer.Net:

- **ASCO Answers Fact Sheet:** [Read a 1-page fact sheet](#) [6] that offers an introduction to CNS tumors. This fact sheet is available as a PDF, so it is easy to print out.
- **Cancer.Net Patient Education Videos:** View short videos led by ASCO experts in [childhood cancers](#) [7] and [brain tumors](#) [8] that provide basic information and areas of research.
- **Cancer.Net En Español:** [Read about astrocytoma in Spanish](#) [9]. [Infórmase sobre astrocitoma en español](#) [9].

*The [next section in this guide is Statistics](#) [10]. It helps explain how many children are diagnosed with this disease and general survival rates. Or, use the menu to choose another section to continue reading this guide.*

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**Links**

- [1] <http://www.cancer.net/cancer-types/astrocytoma-childhood/introduction>
- [2] <http://www.cancer.net/about-us>
- [3] <http://www.cancer.net/node/31323>
- [4] <http://www.cancer.net/node/18494>
- [5] <http://www.cancer.net/node/31327>
- [6] [http://www.cancer.net/sites/cancer.net/files/asco\\_answers\\_cns\\_childhood.pdf](http://www.cancer.net/sites/cancer.net/files/asco_answers_cns_childhood.pdf)
- [7] <http://www.cancer.net/node/27386>
- [8] <http://www.cancer.net/node/27391>
- [9] <http://www.cancer.net/es/node/31367>
- [10] <http://www.cancer.net/node/18489>