

[Astrocytoma - Childhood - Stages and Grades](#) [1]

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ON THIS PAGE: You will learn about how doctors describe astrocytoma's growth or spread. This is called the stage or grade. To see other pages, use the menu.

Stage

Staging is a way of describing where a tumor is located, if or where it has spread, and whether it is affecting other parts of the body. Several types of childhood CNS tumors can spread through the spinal fluid that surrounds the brain and the spine. This information helps the doctor plan the treatment and determine the child's prognosis, which is the chance of recovery.

Grade

In addition to staging, doctors also describe astrocytoma by its grade, which describes how much tumor cells look like healthy cells when viewed under a microscope. The doctor compares the tumor tissue with healthy tissue. Healthy tissue usually contains many different types of cells grouped together. If the tumor cells look similar to healthy tissue and contains different cell groupings, it is called differentiated or a low-grade tumor. If the tumor tissue looks very different from healthy tissue, it is called poorly differentiated or a high-grade tumor. The tumor's grade may help the doctor predict how quickly it will spread. In general, the lower the tumor's grade, the better the prognosis.

The grades of astrocytoma are:

- **Low-grade tumor.** A low-grade tumor has cells that look similar to healthy CNS cells under a microscope. The tumor usually does not grow quickly or spread to other parts of

the CNS. However, the tumor can sometimes grow and spread quickly. Tumors may appear in multiple spots in the brain, especially when the disease is linked with neurofibromatosis (see [Risk Factors](#) [3]). A common low-grade tumor in children is called juvenile pilocytic astrocytoma, or JPA.

- **High-grade tumor.** A high-grade tumor has cells that do not look similar to healthy astrocytes. This type of tumor grows quickly and can spread throughout other parts of the CNS.
- **Recurrent astrocytoma.** Recurrent astrocytoma is a tumor that has come back after treatment. Astrocytoma usually recurs near where it first started. If the tumor does return, there will be another round of tests to learn about the extent of the recurrence. These tests and scans are often similar to those done at the time of the original [diagnosis](#) [4].

Information about the tumor's grade and stage will help the doctor recommend a specific treatment plan. The [next section in this guide is Treatment Options](#) [5]. Or, use the menu to choose another section to continue reading this guide.

Links

- [1] <http://www.cancer.net/cancer-types/astrocytoma-childhood/stages-and-grades>
- [2] <http://www.cancer.net/about-us>
- [3] <http://www.cancer.net/node/18491>
- [4] <http://www.cancer.net/node/18493>
- [5] <http://www.cancer.net/node/18495>