

## **Craniopharyngioma - Childhood - Diagnosis** [1]

This section has been reviewed and approved by the [Cancer.Net Editorial Board](#) [2], 04/2014

**ON THIS PAGE:** You will find a list of the common tests, procedures, and scans that doctors can use to find out what's wrong and identify the cause of the problem. To see other pages, use the menu on the side of your screen.

In diagnosing craniopharyngioma, your child's doctor may consider different factors when choosing tests, including:

- Child's age and medical condition
- Type of tumor suspected
- Signs and symptoms
- Previous test results

The tests listed below may be used to diagnose craniopharyngioma. This list describes options for diagnosing craniopharyngioma, and not all tests listed will be used for every person.

**Physical examination.** The doctor will examine your child's head and body and ask questions about the symptoms he or she is experiencing and his/her medical history. This may also include tests to check your child's vision and CNS function.

**Blood tests.** The doctor may recommend different blood tests, including tests that measure the levels of certain hormones, to help determine whether there is reason to look for a brain tumor.

Results of the physical examination and blood tests may suggest that imaging tests are needed to look for a craniopharyngioma. There are two main types of imaging tests used to find craniopharyngioma.

**Computed tomography (CT or CAT) scan** [3]. A CT scan creates a three-dimensional picture of the brain with an x-ray machine. A computer then combines these images into a detailed, cross-sectional view that shows abnormalities, including tumors. Sometimes, a special dye called a contrast medium is given during the scan to provide better detail. This dye is injected into a patient's vein.

**Magnetic resonance imaging (MRI)** [4]. An MRI uses magnetic fields, not x-rays, to produce detailed images of the brain and/or spinal column. An MRI scan can also be used to measure the

tumor's size. A special dye called a contrast medium is given before the scan to create a clearer picture. This dye is injected into a patient's vein.

**Biopsy** [5]. A biopsy is the removal and examination of a small piece of tumor. A neurosurgeon is a doctor who specializes in CNS surgery. For craniopharyngioma, this means that a neurosurgeon removes a sample of the tumor or the entire tumor so that a pathologist can look at it under a microscope. A pathologist is a doctor who specializes in interpreting laboratory tests and evaluating cells, tissues, and organs to diagnose disease. A neuropathologist is a pathologist who specializes in CNS tissues and diseases. During the surgery, a small piece of tumor may be removed at first and analyzed by the pathologist so that the surgeon knows what kind of tumor it is. Most neurosurgeons will try to remove as much of the tumor as possible once they know that it is a craniopharyngioma (see [Treatment Options](#) [6]).

After diagnostic tests are done, your child's doctor will review all of the results with you.

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

---

**Links:**

- [1] <http://www.cancer.net/cancer-types/craniopharyngioma-childhood/diagnosis>
- [2] <http://www.cancer.net/about-us>
- [3] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24486>
- [4] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24578>
- [5] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24406>
- [6] <http://www.cancer.net/node/18723>