

BRAIN TUMOUR

What is a brain tumour?

A brain tumour is an abnormal mass of tissue in which some cells grow and multiply uncontrollably, apparently unregulated by the mechanisms that control normal cells. The growth of a tumour takes up space within the skull and interferes with normal brain activity. A tumour can cause damage by increasing pressure in the brain, by shifting the brain or pushing against the skull, and by invading and damaging nerves and healthy brain tissue. The location of a brain tumour influences the type of symptoms that occur. Brain tumours rarely spread to other parts of the body outside of the central nervous system.

Some tumour types are more common in children than in adults. When childhood brain tumours occur in adults, they often occur in a different part of the brain than in children. Although most primary tumours attack members of both sexes with equal frequency, some, such as meningiomas occur more frequently in women, whereas others, such as medulloblastomas, more commonly affect boys and young men.

The prognosis for brain tumour patients is as individual as the patients themselves. Your doctors will help you understand the possible repercussions of your specific tumour.

What are the common symptoms of brain tumours?

The most common symptoms include:

- headaches, which can be most severe in the morning;
- nausea or vomiting, which can be most severe in the morning;
- seizures or convulsions;
- difficulty thinking, speaking or finding words;
- personality changes;
- weakness or paralysis in one part or one side of the body;
- loss of balance;
- vision changes;
- confusion and disorientation;
- memory loss

Different parts of the brain control different functions, so symptoms will vary depending on the tumour's location. While these are the most common symptoms of a brain tumour, they can also indicate other medical problems. If you are having any of these symptoms, it is important to see your doctor and get a definitive diagnosis.

What are the common symptoms of brain tumours in children?

Some of the general symptoms of brain tumours in children are:

- headaches;
- vomiting (usually in the morning and without nausea);
- unsteadiness or loss of balance;
- seizures;
- double vision or vision problems;
- decreased coordination;
- fatigue or sleepiness;
- weakness on one side of the body;
- increased size of the head;
- uncontrolled eye movements;
- irritability;
- behavioural changes

Symptoms are often vague in children, especially in very young children who are not able to fully describe their symptoms. Some of these symptoms can occur with a variety of more common childhood illnesses. The difference with brain tumours is that these symptoms persist and get worse over time. If your child is experiencing any of these symptoms, it is important to see a doctor and get a definitive diagnosis.

Paediatric brain tumours are not contagious. Their causes are unknown.