

Similar to most cancers, brain tumours do not show symptoms until they attain a certain size.

Symptoms include:

- persistent headaches that get worse over a period of weeks and are often more intense when lying down.
- vomiting.
- sudden seizures.
- changes in personality or mental ability.

You may also experience other symptoms depending on the type and location of the tumour:

- sudden vision loss, speech problems, or other changes in the senses.
- localised weakness or paralysis, especially in the limbs.
- impaired memory.
- loss of coordination or balance.

Brain cancer that originates in the brain itself is rare. It is more common that cancer elsewhere in the body eventually spreads to the brain. It can happen at any age.

Benign tumours are brain tumours whose cells do not spread. While malignant tumours, or cancers cells multiply uncontrollably and spread throughout the body.

Benign or malignant, no brain tumour is harmless. Either one can exert pressure on delicate brain tissue, produce severe pain, cause irreversible neurological damage, and threaten life. The symptoms and outlook for recovery will depend on the location of the tumour.

Causes

The causes of primary brain cancer are unknown. Research indicates that there may be -

- a genetic link.
- certain chemicals that cause it.
- A few rare diseases that may be culprits

Diagnosis of a brain tumour begins with a complete physical examination and neurological testing.

Traditional Treatments

Curing brain cancer depends on where the tumour is located and how far the malignancy has spread. Whenever possible, a brain tumour is treated surgically. If it can be removed, the patient may recover fully. After surgery, radiation therapy and sometimes chemotherapy are prescribed to make sure stray cancer cells are killed.

But some brain tumours are located too deep in the brain to be removed without causing severe brain damage. In these cases, treatment is likely to be chemotherapy and a refined radiation therapy. Both these treatments are unlikely to cure the cancer, but they may slow the growth of cancer cells, control symptoms, and let the patient live longer.

When cure is impossible, the main focus will be on providing comfort and preserve neurological function. (For further information see our Cancer Section).

Complementary Therapies

The side effects of this disease and the various traditional treatments can become stressful and crippling. There are some alternative therapies that can provide relief - hydrotherapy, yoga, visualisation and meditation. Massage and reflexology, may also help.

When to seek further professional advice

- you experience any of the symptoms listed in the description section