



You've just learned that you have a brain tumour. Here is some information you need to help you understand your disease and the possible treatments.

What is a brain tumour?

This type of tumour occurs when healthy cells within the brain turn into abnormal cells and multiply uncontrollably. A mass of these abnormal cells is called a tumour. Tumours can grow in any part of the head.

As they grow, tumours create pressure within the brain. The pressure can cause many problems, such as headaches, dizziness, confusion, paralysis, etc.

Who is most likely to be affected by this cancer?

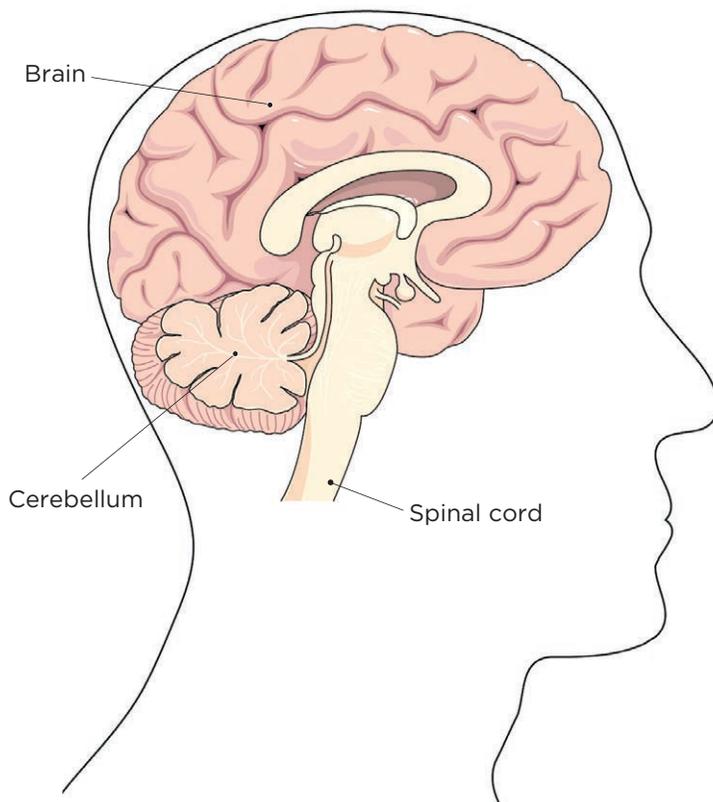
Brain tumours affect men more frequently than women. They affect people of all ages, but mostly those that are over the age of 50.

What causes brain tumours?

The causes are not well understood. We do know, however, that the risk of having a brain tumour is higher in the following cases:

- if the person has been exposed to radiation to the head or neck
- if the person has been exposed to vinyl chloride (a chemical used in the production of PVC - plastic)
- if other members of the family have previously had diseases like neurofibromatosis or Turcot Syndrome
- if the person is HIV-positive

The brain



How is the severity of my brain tumour measured?

To measure severity, doctors look at the size, location, nature (type of cells) and grade (aggressiveness) of the tumour.

Most of the time, specialists need to analyze a sample of the tumour to see what grade it is. The sample is retrieved by making a small hole in the skull (biopsy) or after operating to remove part of or the entire tumour.

There are 2 broad categories of brain tumours:

> Low-grade tumours (grades I and II)

These tumours are made up of slow-growing cells that can take several months or even years to develop.

> High-grade tumours (grades III and IV)

These tumours are made up of fast-growing cells that can take just a few days to a few months to develop. They are also called “aggressive tumours.”

What medical follow-up should I expect?

Regular long-term follow-up is extremely important in treating brain tumours. You will need to have various tests so that your medical team can adjust your treatment as needed.

These tests may include:

- clinical exams that give your doctor information on your state of health
- blood tests that provide regular follow-up on your state of health and treatments outcome in terms of safety



- tests performed with imaging devices, such as a scanner, that let doctors have a good look at the tumour

You may have to take other tests as well. Your doctor will tell you which tests are necessary.



What are the possible treatments?

There are various treatments. The choice will depend on your age and your general state of health, as well as the type and characteristics of the tumour.

To select the most effective treatment, several specialists will discuss your situation. Your wishes, opinions and concerns will also play an important role in choosing a treatment. You will be involved in the final choice.

The following are the most frequent treatments. You may receive more than one.

Surgery

All or part of the tumour is removed.

Radiation therapy

Radiation treatment directs rays towards the tumour. The rays are designed to destroy cancer cells.



Chemotherapy

Treatment with medications designed to destroy cancer cells. Depending on the type of tumour, they are injected into your veins or taken in pill form.

Corticotherapy or anticonvulsant

Treatment with pills that reduce swelling around the tumour as well as convulsions. These complementary treatments help to reduce the problems caused by the tumour or convulsions. They are used at the same time as other treatments.

Clinical trials or research protocols

These are ways of trying out new medications or treatments or new combinations of existing treatments.

What signs or symptoms should I be watching for right now?

The symptoms will vary depending on where the tumour is located in your brain, so each person will have different symptoms. Every situation is unique. Be sure to tell your pivot nurse or your doctor right away if there are any changes in your general state of health or if you have any of the following symptoms:

- heartburn (nausea) or vomiting
- fever
- seeing double
- more frequent or intense headaches
- sleepiness (feeling sleepy in the daytime)
- trouble speaking
- trouble swallowing
- dizziness or loss of balance
- memory problems
- mood swings or personality changes (such as aggressiveness or depression)
- confusion or disorientation
- weakness or paralysis on one side of the body
- uncontrollable muscle movements (such as convulsions or epileptic fits)

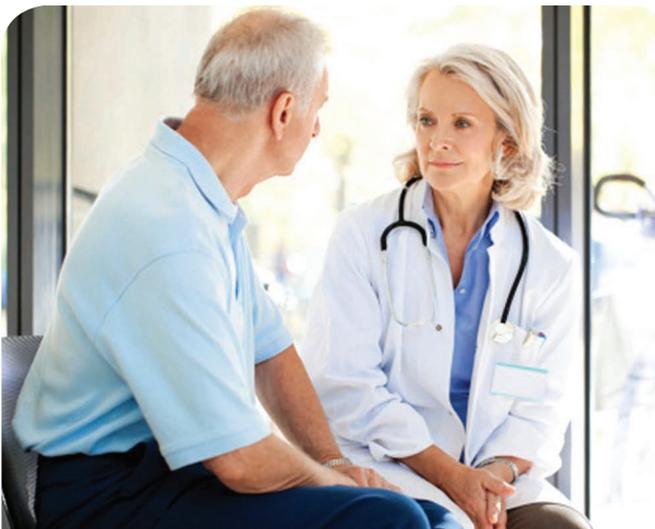


Who should I ask for help or answers to my questions?

If you have questions, feel free to contact your doctor, pivot nurse, or any other member of your care team.

Teams are also on duty in the evening, overnight and on the weekend.

If you feel your situation is urgent, go straight to the nearest emergency room.



USEFUL RESOURCES

Brain Tumour Foundation of Canada:
> braintumour.ca

Other health sheets published by the CHUM are available (in French only). Ask for those that might fit your situation.



You can also find them on our web site
chumontreal.qc.ca/votresante



NOTEPAD



Questions



Resource people and contacts

The content of this document in no way replaces the recommendations and diagnoses made, or the treatment suggested by your health professional.

To find out more about the Centre hospitalier de l'Université de Montréal
chumontreal.qc.ca

