

Neurological Tumors

Primary brain tumors (tumors originating in the brain tissue itself) are relatively rare and make up about 2% of all tumors in adults. Not all brain tumors are deemed to be malignant lesions, but some benign (non-cancerous) lesions can cause serious deficits and even death by virtue of pressure on normal critical structures and are therefore referred to an oncologist. Unlike most other cancers, malignant lesions rarely metastasize to other body parts. Metastases to the brain from a primary tumor that is outside the central nervous system are far more common than primary tumors of the brain. The most common primary tumors that metastasize to the brain are lung, breast, melanoma and kidney. The most common symptoms of brain tumors are related to impaired neurological function and in most cases some or other deficit (depending on the site of the brain lesion) will be the first presenting sign. Symptoms due to increased intracranial pressure (headaches, nausea and vomiting, etc.) may also occur.

To establish a diagnosis and to determine the extent of disease the following investigations are useful:

- CT scan and/or MRI scan of the brain
- Surgery and/or biopsy of the growth

Your doctor may require further investigations depending on your symptoms at presentation

Treatment options

Treatment will depend on the nature and extent of the disease as well as on your general state of health.

Surgical removal of brain tumors is recommended for most types of tumors and in most locations, unless the tumor involves critical structures or is very deep-seated.

Radiation therapy has a major role in the treatment of most tumor types and can increase the cure rate or prolong disease-free survival. It can be given as single treatment modality or after surgical resection. Radiation therapy may also be useful in the treatment of recurrences in patients initially treated with surgery alone.

Chemotherapy has a limited role but may prolong survival in some tumor types. Whilst many of these cancers have a good outcome the final results depend upon factors like the exact type of tumor, the completeness of the surgical resection, extent of the tumor prior to surgery, age, general performance status and the duration of symptoms before diagnosis.

The foregoing information is quite generalized. The specifics of your disease and treatment should be discussed with your oncologist to establish the optimal treatment plan for you as an individual.