



Brain Tumour Australia Information

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The Brain - Tumour Information

The Brain—Tumour Information

Medical Terms

The term or word "brain tumour" covers a wide range of different types of tumours.

The language used may speak of primary or secondary; metastatic; malignant; fast growing; low grade; slow growing; benign; hormone producing or a range of other confusing terms may be mentioned.

When you receive a diagnosis of a brain tumour, terms and the language used may seem foreign and overwhelming.

A brief explanation of some of the language used is provided to assist you at a difficult period in your life.

- Brain tumours (or cancer) can be benign or malignant.
- Benign brain tumours may be slow growing, are not cancerous and are usually contained within their normal boundary (have distinct borders); but they may grow and damage surrounding tissues by pressure. Benign brain tumours are always primary i.e. they start in the brain. A benign tumour does not usually invade surrounding tissues or send secondaries to other parts of the body, however it may press on normal structures within the brain and if it is located in a vital area of the brain, it can still be considered serious or life threatening.
- Malignant brain tumours consist of cancerous cells that may spread into surrounding area of the brain. The growth of these cells may be fast. The degree to which the tumour invades surrounding tissue tells us how malignant it is. A tumour may be called low grade, meaning it does this slowly (over many years) or high-grade (from weeks to a few months).

A tumour may also lie anywhere between these two extremes.

Malignant tumours are life threatening

Both types of brain tumours may require treatment and your general practitioner, neurologist or neurosurgeon or oncologist will advise you on the treatment options available.

Brain tumours can be either primary tumours or secondary tumours.

- A primary brain tumour is a tumour at its original location.
- A secondary brain tumour consists of a secondary growth (or growths) that have developed from a cancer starting somewhere else in the body. These secondary tumours are also called metastasis (or mets). There may be one (isolated) or several (multiple).

Some types of cancer that may spread to the brain are:

- Lung (small cell and non small cell) cancer
- Melanoma
- Breast cancer
- Renal cell cancer (cancer of the kidney)
- Bowel (or colon) cancer
- Testicular

Overview & Location of different tumours—see Sheet 5

Various Types of Tumours—see Sheet 6-11

Grading of Tumours— see Sheet 5