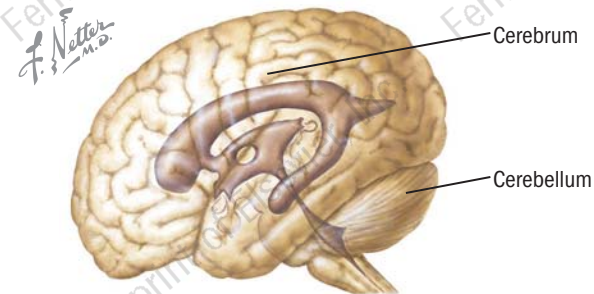
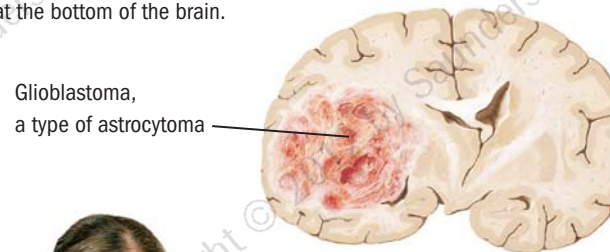


MANAGING YOUR ASTROCYTOMA



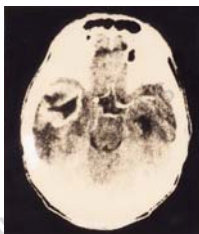
The brain has two major parts, the cerebrum and cerebellum. Astrocytomas can occur in both parts. Children more often have tumors in the cerebellum, at the bottom of the brain.



A common symptom is a headache. Some people have new seizures. Other symptoms include vision and speech problems, confusion, disorientation, memory problems, and irritability.



CT scan of the brain showing a tumor



Your doctor may do a CT scan (shown here) or an MRI scan of your brain. These scans can show brain tumors.



A biopsy is the only sure way to find out whether you have a tumor and what kind it is.

What Are Astrocytomas?

The brain is the major organ of your central nervous system and is made up of nerve cells (neurons) and supportive (glial) tissue. Different cells make up glial tissue, astrocytes and oligodendrocytes being the most numerous. Astrocytomas are brain cancers formed from astrocytes.

Astrocytomas are the most common brain tumors in adults. Children can also have them.

What Causes Astrocytomas?

The cause is unknown. Astrocytomas cannot be caught and aren't passed on from generation to generation.

What Are the Symptoms of Astrocytomas?

Symptoms are headaches (perhaps with nausea and vomiting) or new seizures. Other symptoms include weakness of arms or legs on one side of the body, vision and speech problems, and a change in mental abilities, such as confusion, disorientation, memory problems, and irritability.

How Are Astrocytomas Diagnosed?

The doctor makes a diagnosis on the basis of symptoms, but the first symptoms may be vague and often confused with tension headaches or sinus infections, so it's hard to diagnose. The doctor also uses magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) and computed tomography (CT). If MRI or CT scans show a mass, the only way to prove the diagnosis is to perform a biopsy. For a biopsy, a small piece of the mass is removed and studied under the microscope.

Astrocytomas can be grades I, II, III, or IV. Grades I and II are low-grade tumors, and grades III and IV are high-grade tumors. This system helps doctors decide about treatment and prognosis.

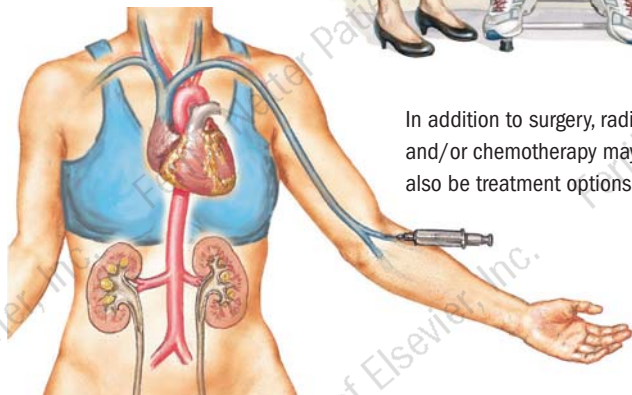


Treatment involves different specialists, including a neurosurgeon (doctor who operates on the nervous system), an oncologist (doctor who treats cancer), and a radiation oncologist (doctor who uses radiation to treat cancer).

After your doctor makes a diagnosis, it's important to have treatment as soon as possible. Surgery is the first treatment of almost all astrocytomas. It also helps the doctor make a diagnosis and decide on the tumor grade.



In addition to surgery, radiation and/or chemotherapy may also be treatment options.



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How Are Astrocytomas Treated?

Rapid treatment, with surgery, radiation therapy, or chemotherapy, is very important. Treatment involves different specialists, including a neurosurgeon (a doctor specializing in nervous system surgery), oncologist (a doctor specializing in cancer treatment), and radiation oncologist (a doctor specializing in treating cancer with radiation).

Surgery is used first for almost all astrocytomas, to remove all or as much of the tumor as possible. Complications include bleeding, infection, and permanent nervous system problems.

Most people have radiation therapy after surgery. Complications include dry, red, itchy skin over the radiation site.

People with low-grade astrocytomas don't usually have chemotherapy. People with high-grade astrocytomas can be given chemotherapy with some good results. Side effects are nausea, vomiting, infections, hair loss, easy bruising, and easy bleeding.

DOs and DON'Ts in Managing Astrocytomas:

- ✓ **DO** realize that about 10% to 35% of astrocytomas (usually grade I) can be completely removed and cured.
- ✓ **DO** know that treatment of low-grade astrocytomas depends partly on tumor location.
- ✓ **DO** understand that astrocytomas are hard to remove completely.
- ✓ **DO** call your doctor if you have a severe headache with nausea and vomiting, muscle weakness on one side of your body, a seizure, or speech or vision problems.
- ✓ **DO** call your doctor if you have side effects from treatments, such as fever after chemotherapy.
- ✓ **DO** call your doctor if you need a referral to a specialist.
- ⊗ **DON'T** miss follow-up appointments with your doctor.
- ⊗ **DON'T** be afraid to ask for a second opinion. Ask for the opinion of doctors who are experienced in the treatment of people with astrocytomas.
- ⊗ **DON'T** forget to take your medicines prescribed by your doctor.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Contact the following source:

- American Cancer Society
Tel: (800) ACS-2345 (227-2345)
Website: <http://www.cancer.org>