

Spinal Tumors

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Overview

- Spinal tumors are **abnormal growths of tissue found inside the spinal column**. Spinal tumors that result from cancer spreading from other parts of the body are called **metastatic tumors**. Tumors that originate in the spine, known as **primary tumors**, are very rare.
- Primary tumors may be either benign or malignant. Although benign tumors can cause pain and damage bone, they are not as serious as malignant tumors. Metastatic tumors, which have already spread from elsewhere in the body to the spine, are, by definition, always malignant.

What are the symptoms associated with spinal tumors?

- While back pain due to muscle strains or disc problems usually worsens with activities and improves with rest, **back pain from a tumor is typically constant**. Rest or lying down offers little or no relief and, in fact, **the pain may occur more frequently at night**.
- Other symptoms of spinal tumors may include symptoms associated with **nerve root or spinal cord compression** such as arm/leg pain, numbness, or weakness, and even partial paralysis.

What are the potential causes of spinal tumors?

- The cause of most primary tumors is **unknown**. However, a **genetic predisposition** is likely. In a small number of people, primary tumors may result from a specific genetic disease (e.g., neurofibromatosis) or from exposure to cancer-causing agents.

How are spinal tumors diagnosed?

- Following a thorough history and neurological exam, the most common tests for spinal tumors include **X-rays, MRI and/or CT scan, bone scan, and a possible biopsy**, after which a definitive treatment plan will be formulated.



How are spinal tumors treated?

- The 3 most common treatments for spinal tumors are **surgery, radiation and chemotherapy**.
- The appropriate treatment plan will depend on the specifics of the case but always requires a **multidisciplinary approach** to include the spine surgeon, medical oncologist, and radiation oncologist.
- Because not all spinal surgeons treat spinal tumors it is important to seek out a fellowship-trained spine surgeon with expertise and experience in treating this condition.