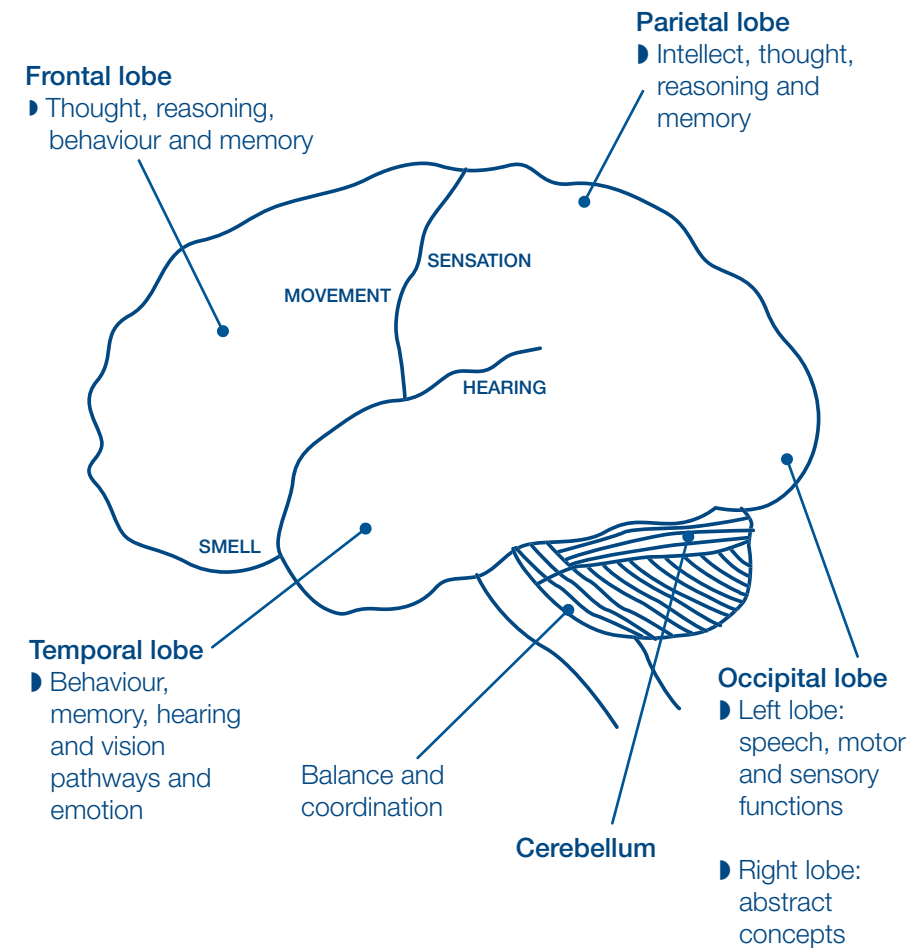


Lobe of the brain Side view



The Cancer Council Queensland's Brain Tumour Support Service provides information, referral and support to people who have a brain tumour, their family and friends. This is a free service of Cancer Council Queensland.

What the service provides:

- Information regarding brain tumours, treatment, support agencies, rehabilitation services as well as practical and financial assistance.
- Regular meetings that provide opportunities to meet other people who have a brain tumour and hear health professionals discuss topics of interest.
- Regular newsletters for information and support. View the Brain Tumour Support Service Newsletter online at www.cancerqld.org.au.

Cancer Council Queensland can provide written material about diagnosis and treatment. For information about booklets, other resources and the Brain Tumour Support Service phone the Cancer Council Helpline on 13 11 20 Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm or contact the nearest office of Cancer Council Queensland. Alternatively, write an email to helpline@cancerqld.org.au.

Disclaimer: The information enclosed is provided for educational purposes or for personal use only. Cancer Council Queensland (CCQ) strongly advises this information should not be used as a substitute for seeking medical or health care advice. We strongly recommend that you seek advice from your doctor or treating health care team before making any decision about your health care treatment. Please note that the information enclosed reflects the opinion of the author/s at the time of writing. Every effort has been made by CCQ to ensure its accuracy, however CCQ and its advisors do not accept any liability in relation to this information. This publication is current as at April 2011.



For information and support call
Monday to Friday, 8am – 6pm

www.cancerqld.org.au

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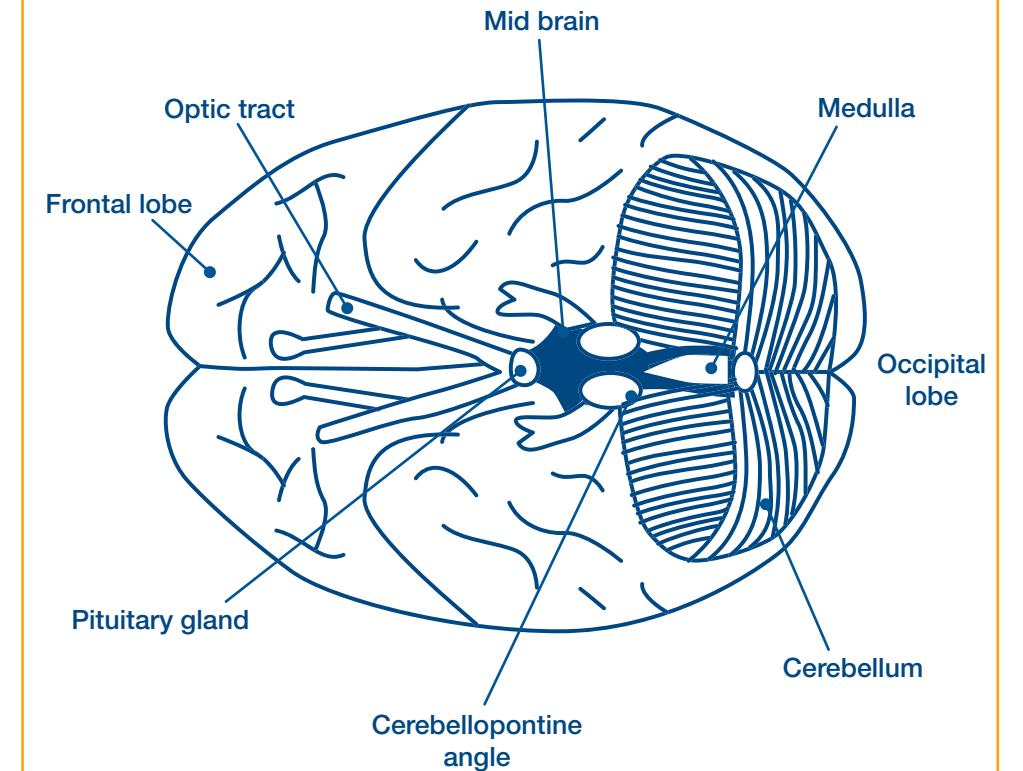


About brain tumours

Information about brain tumours and how to deal with the changes you and the people who care for you are facing.

Cancer Council Helpline 13 11 20
www.cancerqld.org.au

Lobe of the brain View from beneath



This fold-out provides some basic information about brain tumours and a few hints on how to deal with the changes you and the people who care for you are facing.

Understanding your brain tumour

The anxiety you feel after diagnosis is a natural response, affecting not only you but those close to you as well. Adjustment can be easier if everyone involved understands what is happening and has some idea of what to expect. Understanding your brain tumour can help you feel more comfortable and more in control.

The first step is to seek accurate, comprehensive medical information regarding this disease and its treatment. This information should be obtained from a specialist experienced in treating people with brain tumours. The feelings of helplessness and lack of control which commonly follow diagnosis can be reduced if you ask questions and participate in decisions regarding your care and treatment. The health professionals involved in assisting people with brain tumours are neurosurgeons, radiotherapists, medical and radiation oncologists, neuropsychologists, neurologists, nurses and social workers. There are also organisations such as Cancer Council Queensland that can assist with information about your diagnosis and treatment as well as provide support to help with coping.

Once the diagnosis is made, it helps to share the news with those close to you.

Whenever possible, bring a family member or friend to medical appointments.

This person can give moral support and help you to remember information provided. It is also helpful to take a small notebook along to write down information and to keep a record of visits and treatment plans. You will also find it helpful to take note of the exact name of the brain tumour. This will help you in your search for further information.

A brain tumour can be benign (non-cancerous) or malignant (cancerous)

It can also be a primary tumour, arising in the brain itself or a secondary tumour, spread from another part of the body. In benign brain tumours, if the tumour can be removed successfully it should not cause any further problems.

However a small proportion do regrow slowly and these recurrences can usually be removed, when necessary, by a further operation. It is very rare for primary malignant brain tumours to spread to other parts of the body, but they may cause problems by invading the normal brain tissue which surrounds them.

Many brain tumours found and treated early cause little or no permanent damage to mental or physical abilities. Many others can be treated with surgery, radiation, chemotherapy or a combination of these methods, resulting in prolonged life. Each year, further progress in treating this disease is made by dedicated researchers.

What to expect

The effects of a brain tumour are varied and usually depend on the type of tumour, the size, and location in the brain. The brain is surrounded by a bony skull and there is a limited amount of space inside the hard confines of the skull. This means the growth of anything that doesn't belong there causes changes in normal brain function. These changes may be temporary or permanent, depending on the cause.

Tumours may cause direct pressure which affects brain cells, shifting of the brain due to tumour growth, or pressure which affects brain areas distant from the tumour, causing changes in their function. You may experience several generalised symptoms. These can be due to emotional or physical stress caused by treatment or by the tumour itself. Lack of appetite, depression, irritability, fatigue, sleeplessness, sexual difficulties, erratic memory and restlessness are common complaints. Nausea, bladder problems or constipation can also occur.

Blockage of the natural flow of cerebrospinal fluid (CSF), the brain's 'water bed', may cause problems. Some may need a by-passing (shunt) to relieve the blockage. Irritation in parts of the brain caused by a tumour may result in epilepsy. Interruption of nerve function may result in weakness or loss of muscle control. If this involves one side of the body, it is called hemiplegia. Medication used to treat brain tumours, for example, Dexamethasone, can also cause side-effects such as irritability. Remember, your health care team is there to help you deal with these problems.

The side-effects of brain tumours can be directly related to where the tumour is located:

► Frontal tumours

May cause you to feel disinterested in your surrounds, mood swings, changes in moral and ethical judgement and intellectual impairment. Short term memory (memory of recent events) may be lost.

► Parietal tumours

Can result in sensory illusions (such as feelings of 'pins and needles'), inability to recognise objects by touch, inability to distinguish right from left and difficulty reading.

► Temporal tumours

Are frequently 'silent' unless they reach a significant size and can cause a dreamy 'déjà vu' state. Also, aphasia, or the loss of ability to understand language, is usually associated with this area.

► Occipital tumours

Can disturb vision and visual memory. There may be double vision, visual hallucinations or partial loss of vision.

► Optic nerve tumours

Can reduce visual accuracy and can cause double vision.

► Cerebello Pontine angle tumours (such as acoustic neuromas)

Cause pressure on the cranial nerves, and ringing in the ears and hearing loss (especially in using the telephone) can occur.

► Brain stem tumours

Can affect tongue movements and cause difficulty in swallowing or speaking. Unusual eye movements can cause dizziness or unsteadiness in walking.

► Hypothalamic and pituitary tumours

Can cause abnormal growth or suppress hormone production. Thyroid function and sex gland function can be affected. Appetite can be affected and you may experience loss in sexual desire with tumours in this area of the brain (loss of sexual desire may also occur with tumours in other areas of the brain).

► Posterior fossa tumours (such as choroid plexus, fourth ventricle and cerebellar tumours)

May cause tremors or a lack of co-ordination in walking. Nausea may also occur.

Coping Strategies

There is no one right or wrong way to cope with the challenges of a brain tumour but the following strategies may help.

Don't bottle things up – It is normal to experience difficult thoughts and feelings after a brain tumour diagnosis and treatment. Upsetting thoughts can build up like steam in a pressure cooker. Talking about how you feel can relieve some of the pressure, allows others to understand, and opens the way for others to offer support. Some people find that writing down their thoughts and feelings provides a release and helps them gain perspective.

Take up offers of support - Think about what would make a difference to you (e.g. go with you to appointments, keep other people informed, cook meals, drop off children, attend an activity/outing with you). Then when people offer to help, you can give them some ideas in advance. This helps you as well as allowing others to feel useful and more involved in your journey.

Make regular time to unwind – Don't wait for feelings of stress to become overwhelming. Make sure you plan to do something to wind down each day such as going for a gentle walk, listening to music, doing meditation or just spending time alone.

Take care of your health – Exercise and good nutrition can help you to cope mentally and physically with the demands of diagnosis and treatment. Even gentle activity can sometimes help with fatigue and reducing feelings of stress. Eating the right kinds of food during and after treatment can help you feel better and stay stronger.

Avoid numbing the pain with drugs or alcohol - Trying to avoid unpleasant emotions by numbing them will only make things more difficult to cope with in the long run.

Know where to go for support – There are a number of services that can provide you with different types of support during and after treatment. Support groups provide information and contact with others in similar circumstances. The Cancer Counselling Service provides free, short-term telephone or face-to-face counselling to anyone distressed by cancer, including family and close support people. Call the Cancer Council Helpline on 13 11 20 to discuss support services to suit your needs.