

## CANCER FACTS

# Brain Tumours

Tumours of the brain are often classified as benign (not cancer) or malignant (cancer).

A malignant brain tumour that first develops in the brain is called a primary brain cancer. A secondary tumour starts in another part of the body and sometimes travels through the bloodstream to the brain.

Malignant tumours can grow rapidly. They are considered life threatening because they may spread within the brain and spinal cord or come back after treatment. Malignant brain tumours usually do not spread outside the brain and spinal cord.

Benign brain tumours usually grow slowly and are unlikely to spread but can grow and affect how the brain works. For a benign tumour, surgery may be the only treatment needed.

## Queensland<sup>1,2</sup>

- 369 Queenslanders were diagnosed with brain cancer in 2017 (the most recent figures available).
- 290 Queenslanders died from brain cancer in 2017.
- On average, people diagnosed with brain cancer were 24 per cent as likely to live for another five years compared to the general population.

## Trends in Queensland<sup>2</sup>

Brain cancer diagnosis and death rates were stable for both males and females from 1982-2017.

## Detection and symptoms<sup>3</sup>

The effects of a brain tumour are varied and usually depend on the type of tumour, the size and its location in the brain.

Tumours may cause:

- direct pressure which affects brain cells
- shifting of the brain due to the tumour growth
- pressure which affects brain areas distant from the tumour, causing changes in their function.

Several generalised symptoms could be experienced which may include:

- headaches – often worse when you wake up
- nausea and vomiting – often worse in the morning or after changing position
- irritability and confusion
- blurred or double vision
- seizures (fits) – can be obvious, involving a loss of consciousness, or more subtle, such as ‘zoning out’
- weakness in parts of the body
- drowsiness – a later symptom.

## Risk factors

The causes of most brain tumours are unknown, but factors known to increase the risk include:

- Family history – while it is rare for brain tumours to run in families, a fault in the genes, usually passed down from either the mother or father, can increase the risk of developing a brain tumour. For example, some people have a genetic condition called neurofibromatosis which can lead to tumours of the brain and spinal cord.
- Radiation therapy – people who have had radiation therapy to the head, particularly to treat childhood leukaemia, may have a slightly higher risk of developing a brain tumour.

## Reducing cancer risk

There are no proven measures to prevent brain tumours. Cancer Council Queensland recommends that to reduce your overall cancer risk you should; quit smoking, maintain a healthy body weight, eat a healthy diet, be physically active, stay SunSmart, limit alcohol, participate in cancer screening programs (if eligible) and talk to your doctor if you notice any unusual changes in your body.

1. Queensland Cancer Register, 2020. Unpublished data (1982-2017).

2. Queensland Cancer Statistics On-Line, 2020. Viertel Cancer Research Centre, Cancer Council Queensland ([qcsol.cancerqld.org.au](https://qcsol.cancerqld.org.au)). Based on data released by the Queensland Cancer Register (1982-2017; released July 2020).

3. Understanding brain tumours, Cancer Council, April 2018 (<https://cancerqld.org.au/content/resources/library/understanding%20brain%20tumours.pdf>)

# Brain Tumours

## Information and support

Cancer Council Queensland's support services are available to people diagnosed with malignant brain tumours and their families. Those diagnosed with benign brain tumours may be able to access some of our programs and services. For more information, please call Cancer Council's 13 11 20 Information and Support line.

### Cancer Council 13 11 20

Being diagnosed with cancer or supporting a loved one can leave you with many questions. We want to help you find the answers. Call Cancer Council's 13 11 20 Information and Support line to talk with one of the team.

Our team can provide you with cancer information, emotional and practical support. We can also refer you to Cancer Council Queensland's support programs and services.

This confidential service is available Monday to Friday 9am-5pm (excluding public holidays).

### Cancer Connect

Cancer Connect is a confidential telephone-based peer support service that connects you, your carer or loved ones with a peer support volunteer who has had a similar cancer experience. You can be matched with a Cancer Connect volunteer based on cancer diagnosis, treatment, family or work issues.

### Cancer Counselling Service

Living with a cancer diagnosis, or supporting someone along the way, is rarely easy. Talking things through with a counsellor or psychologist can help you manage your cancer related concerns.

Our Cancer Counselling Service is available for anyone distressed by cancer at any stage. We deliver counselling via telephone and video, with face to face appointments available in some regional offices. Our team includes nurse counsellors and psychologists trained and experienced in helping people affected by cancer.

## Further information and support



**13 11 20**



**Email**



**Webchat**

**Disclaimer:** The information in this publication should not be used as a substitute for advice from a properly qualified medical professional who can advise you about your own individual medical needs. It is not intended to constitute medical advice and is provided for general information purposes only. Information on cancer, including the diagnosis, treatment and prevention of cancer, is constantly being updated and revised by medical professionals and the research community.

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