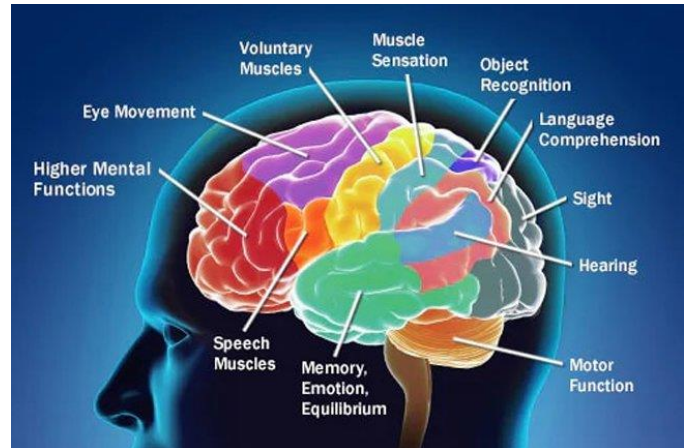


Cancer: What Complications Can Brain Cancer Cause?

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How Cancer Affects Your Brain

Your brain is in charge of everything your body does, including vision, hearing, speech, and movement. As brain cancer grows, it presses on and damages areas that control these things. That can lead to complications like headaches, seizures, vision and hearing loss, and balance issues. Your doctor will help you manage these problems while you get treatments for your cancer.



Fatigue

A lot of people with brain cancer deal with this. You feel exhausted because your body uses a lot of energy to fight off the tumor. Cancer-related fatigue isn't normal tiredness. It wipes you out. The cancer also makes it harder for you to sleep soundly. Even when you can sleep, it doesn't always relieve the weariness. To curb fatigue, break up tasks into small chunks and take rest breaks during the day.



Headaches

About half of people with brain cancer get headaches. The tumor itself doesn't cause pain. But as it grows, it can press on sensitive nerves and blood vessels in the brain. Headaches can last for several hours. They can feel dull, aching, pounding, or throbbing. They're often worse in the morning or can flare up when you cough or exercise. Your doctor can prescribe medicine to help control the pain.



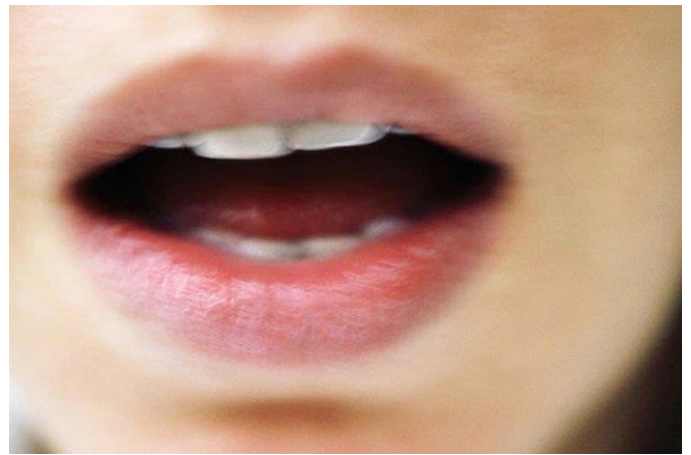
Nausea and Vomiting

A tumor can make you sick to your stomach if it presses on certain areas of your brain. Cancer treatments like radiation and chemotherapy also cause nausea and vomiting. "Anti-emetic" medicines relieve nausea. They come in a liquid, tablet, and capsule -- or as a suppository if you're too sick to swallow medicine. Call your doctor if you can't keep down any foods or fluids, or you've been throwing up for more than 24 hours.



Speech and Language Problems

Cancer can affect parts of your brain that help you speak and process language. You might struggle to find the right words, or mix up words when you describe objects ("chair" instead of "table," for instance). It can also be harder to understand what other people say, or to follow a conversation. Language problems can be frustrating. Relax and slow down when you speak. A speech and language therapist can also help with communication.



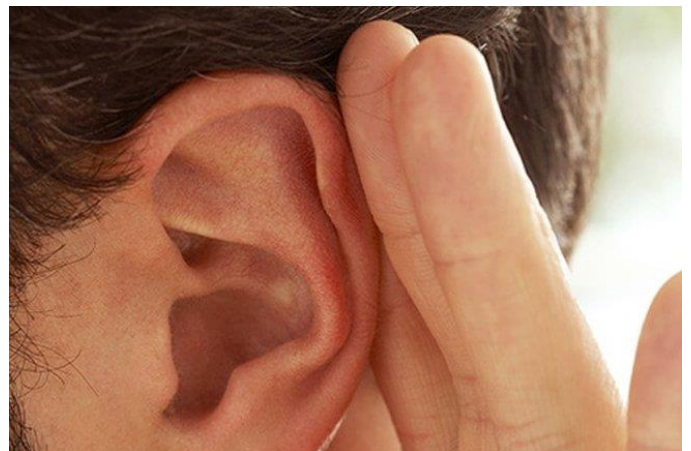
Vision Problems

A brain area called the occipital lobe processes the images your eyes see. A tumor in this part of the brain could affect your vision. Blurred vision, double vision, and floating spots can all be signs of a brain tumor. Your sight might go gray when you stand up or change position quickly. If you have these symptoms, see your doctor for a vision test. Surgery and other treatments that shrink the tumor can improve vision problems.



Hearing Loss

A tumor can put pressure on the nerves in your inner ear that move sound from your ear to your brain. Depending on where the tumor is, you might first lose the ability to hear high-pitched or low-pitched sounds. Ringing in the ears is also common. The hearing loss can come on slowly, and it might only be in one ear. See your doctor for a hearing test and treatment options.



Balance Issues

The cerebellum, an area in the lower part of your brain, controls your coordination and balance. This region helps keep you steady on your feet. A tumor in the cerebellum can throw off your balance and cause you to stumble or drop things. If you have balance problems, see a physical therapist. You might need a walker or cane to help you get around safely. Wear shoes with non-skid soles, and avoid walking on uneven or slippery surfaces.



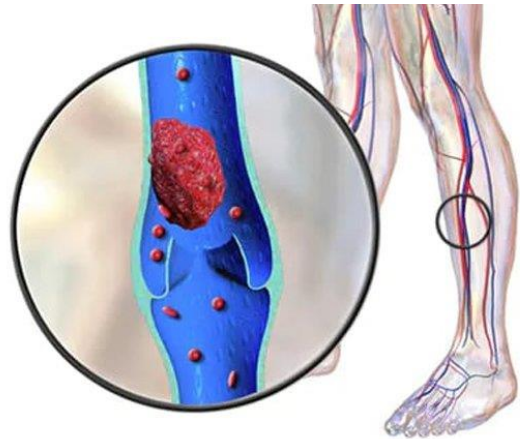
Personality and Mood Changes

More than half of people with brain cancer have personality or mood changes. It's common to feel more angry, withdrawn, anxious, or irritable than usual. Some of these changes may be part of your response to your cancer diagnosis and treatment. Others start when the tumor grows into areas of your brain that control mood and emotion. Talk with your doctor or a mental health specialist. Therapy can help you manage what you're going through.



Deep Vein Thrombosis (DVT)

Tumors release chemicals that make your body more likely to form blood clots. Nearly 1 in 5 people with brain tumors get deep vein thrombosis (DVT), a clot in a deep vein in the leg. If the clot moves into your lungs (pulmonary embolism), it could be life-threatening. See a doctor if you have swelling, redness, and tenderness in your leg. Taking blood thinners will stop the clot from getting bigger and prevent new clots from forming.



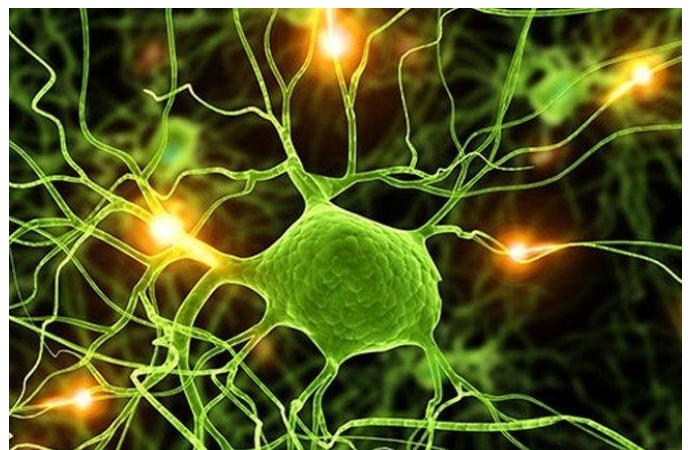
Memory Loss

If you're more forgetful, it could be due to both your cancer and its treatments. Tumors can harm short-term and long-term memory, depending on their location. Chemotherapy and other treatments affect concentration and leave you mentally foggy. You may hear it called "chemo brain." Use a notebook, daily planner, and smartphone apps to remind you. An occupational therapist can show you how to make work and home tasks easier.



Seizures

About 60% of people with brain cancer get seizures, which are sudden bursts of abnormal electrical activity in the brain. Tumors may trigger them by changing brain cells or chemicals in a way that makes nerve cells fire too often. During a seizure, some people shake. Others stare off into space. Anti-seizure medicines can help. Also, avoid triggers, like loud noises or too little sleep.



Numbness and Weakness

A brain area called the parietal lobe helps you process the sensation of touch. A tumor in this part of your brain can cause numbness, or a tingling sensation that feels like pins and needles. Often the numbness affects only one side of your body, such as one arm or leg. One side of your body might also be weaker than the other. Tell your doctor about these symptoms.



Treating Your Cancer

The treatments you get to shrink your cancer will also ease its complications and can include:

- Surgery to remove as much of the tumor as possible.
- Radiation therapy uses high-energy X-rays to destroy cancer cells or slow their growth.
- Chemotherapy medicines kill cancer cells.
- Targeted therapy attacks the parts of cancer cells that help them grow and multiply.
- Alternating electric field therapy uses a device to produce an electric field that can slow the growth and spread of tumor cells.



When to Call Your Doctor

You'll see your medical team often for your brain cancer treatment. Tell your doctors about any symptoms that are new or changing, including:

- Seizures
- Confusion
- Extreme fatigue
- Vision loss
- Hearing problems
- Loss of balance
- Severe headaches
- Trouble thinking or speaking



Sources:

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