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*All patient resources are
available free-of-charge.
Please contact us for more
information about any
of these resources or
opportunities.*

Pituitary Tumours

What is a pituitary tumour and does everyone with a pituitary tumour require surgery?

The pituitary is a crucial hormone producing gland located in a bony cavity at the base of the skull. Through its effect on virtually all other glands, the pituitary controls several critical functions such as growth and maturity, fertility and sexual function, water balance, energy balance and response to stress. The tumours of the pituitary (also known as pituitary adenomas) constitute about 10% of all intracranial growths and are being more commonly diagnosed due to increasing frequency and progressive refinement of imaging procedures.

Although mostly benign, these tumours are clinically diverse and based on their hormone producing status are divided into two broad categories: a) **non-functioning tumours**, which do not produce any hormones, and b) **functioning tumours**, which produce one or more pituitary hormones. The management of these tumours depends upon their size and hormone producing capacity. In general, small non-functioning tumours generally do not require anything more than close observation through regular CT or MRI scans. On the other hand, large non-functioning tumours that are pushing against the surrounding tissue such as the optic nerves require surgery.

The most common functional adenomas are benign, prolactin secreting tumours, called prolactinomas. These can be easily treated with medications (pills) and very rarely require surgery. Other functioning tumours such as growth hormone producing tumours causing a condition known as acromegaly or ACTH producing tumours causing Cushing's disease are rare and require a combination of medical treatment and surgery. Occasionally, both functioning and non-functioning tumours that are not controlled through medical or surgical treatment may require focused radiation therapy. Most pituitary tumour patients require continuing surveillance through specialist centers.

*Thank you to **Dr. S. Ali Imran MBBS, FRCP, FRCPC**, an Associate Professor in Division of Endocrinology at the QEII Health Sciences Centre in Halifax, Nova Scotia, who is a member of our Professional Advisory Group, for answering this important question.*

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