Pituitary Tumors

Pituitary tumors are abnormal growths found in the pituitary gland. This is a small organ. It is about the size of a dime and is located in the center of the brain. It makes hormones that affect growth and the functions of other glands in the body. Most pituitary tumors are benign. This means they are non-cancerous. They grow slowly and do not spread to other parts of the body. A pituitary tumor may make the pituitary gland produce too many hormones. This can cause other problems in the body. Tumors that make hormones are called functioning tumors. Those that do not make hormones are called non-functioning tumors. Certain pituitary tumors cause Cushing's disease. This disease causes fat to build up in the face, back and chest. The arms and legs become thin. Other pituitary tumors can cause acromegaly which is a condition in which the hands, feet and face are larger than normal. Another type of tumor can cause breasts to make milk even though there is no pregnancy.

SYMPTOMS

Symptoms may include:

- Headaches.
- Vision problems.
- Nausea and vomiting.
- Any of the problems caused by the production of too many hormones, such as:
  - Infertility or loss of menstrual periods in women.
  - Abnormal growth.
  - High blood pressure.
  - Heat or cold intolerance.
  - Other skin and body changes.

TREATMENT

These tumors are best treated when they are found and diagnosed early. Treatments include:

- Surgical removal of the tumor. This is the most common treatment.
- Radiation therapy, using high-doses of x-rays to kill tumor cells.
- Drug therapy, using certain medications to block the pituitary gland from producing too many hormones.

Prognosis depends on the type of pituitary tumor, the patient's age and general state of health. These tumors are usually curable.

RESEARCH BEING DONE

The NINDS supports and conducts a broad range of biomedical research on brain tumors, including pituitary tumors. Much of this research is aimed at discovering the cause(s) of brain tumors, finding better treatments, and ultimately preventing and curing them.

Research is continually being done to learn more about this problem.

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