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Central nervous system tumors.

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Abstract

Central nervous system tumors are relatively common in the United States, with more than 40,000 cases annually. Although more than half of these tumors are benign, they can cause substantial morbidity. Malignant primary brain tumors are the leading cause of death from solid tumors in children and the third leading cause of death from cancer in adolescents and adults aged 15 to 34 years. Common presenting symptoms include headache, seizures, and altered mental status. Whereas magnetic resonance imaging helps define the anatomic extent of tumor, biopsy is often required to confirm the diagnosis. Treatment depends on the histologic diagnosis. Benign tumors are usually curable with surgical resection or radiation therapy including stereotactic radiation; however, most patients with malignant brain tumors benefit from chemotherapy either at the time of initial diagnosis or at tumor recurrence. Metastases to the brain remain a frequent and morbid complication of solid tumors but are frequently controlled with surgery or radiation therapy. Unfortunately, the mortality rate from malignant brain tumors remains high, despite initial disease control. This article provides an overview of current diagnostic and treatment approaches for patients with primary and metastatic brain tumors.

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