

Pituitary Tumor: Symptoms



What are the symptoms of pituitary tumors?

Not all pituitary tumors cause symptoms. But those that do can cause different kinds of symptoms.

Pituitary tumors that make too many hormones (called functional tumors) cause symptoms linked to the hormone they produce.

Pituitary tumors that don't make too many hormones (called nonfunctional tumors) can grow large (macroadenomas). They cause symptoms because they press on nearby nerves and other areas.

Symptoms caused by tumor pressure

Noncancerous and cancerous pituitary tumors may press on the optic nerves or nearby parts of the brain. This can cause these symptoms:

- Double or blurred vision
- Loss of side (peripheral) vision
- Sudden loss of sight
- Headaches
- Dizziness
- Numbness or pain in the face
- Fainting

Pituitary growths may also press on and damage the pituitary gland. This can lead to decreased release of important pituitary hormones. Depending on the hormone levels affected, you may have some of the following symptoms:

- Upset stomach (nausea and vomiting)
- Weakness and tiredness
- Unwanted weight loss or gain
- Feeling cold
- Menstrual periods change or stop
- Having problems keeping an erection (impotence)
- Less interest in sex
- Breast tissue growth in men
- Loss of body hair
- Excessive thirst and frequent peeing. (This can cause dehydration and electrolyte imbalances. If not treated, it can lead to coma or even death.)
- Constipation

- Aching joints

Symptoms caused by excess hormones

Functional pituitary tumors cause different symptoms, based on the excess hormone they make. Here are symptoms of the most common functional pituitary tumors. Other, more rare, kinds of pituitary tumors may produce hormones such as prolactin and thyroid-stimulating hormone. And they may cause other symptoms. If you have any abnormal symptoms, see a healthcare provider.

Pituitary tumors that make growth hormone (GH)

Symptoms caused by having too much GH are different in children than in adults. For children, symptoms include:

- Rapid growth
- Pain in joints
- Too much sweating
- Being abnormally tall (gigantism)

Over time, adults with tumors that cause high GH levels may have these symptoms:

- Increase in hat, shoe, or ring size caused by growth of head, hands, or feet
- Deeper voice
- Change in facial structure
- Tongue thickening
- Snoring or pauses in breathing while sleeping
- Joint pain
- Too much sweating
- Headaches
- Heart disease
- High blood sugar levels or diabetes
- High blood pressure
- Kidney stones
- Increased body hair growth

Pituitary tumors that make ACTH (corticotropin)

Pituitary tumors that make the hormone ACTH cause the adrenal glands to make too many steroid hormones. This is called Cushing disease and may lead to:

- Weight gain, often in the belly, chest, and face
- Purple stretch marks on the belly and chest
- A hump of fat on the back of the neck

- Abnormal growth of body hair
- A round, red, swollen face
- Less interest in sex
- Weak, brittle bones (osteoporosis)
- Acne
- High blood pressure
- High blood sugar levels
- Irregular or absent menstrual periods in women
- Headaches
- Vision changes
- Moodiness or depression
- Easy bruising
- Muscle weakness

When to see your healthcare provider

Many of these symptoms may be caused by other health problems. It's important to see a healthcare provider if you have these symptoms. Only a healthcare provider can tell if you have a pituitary tumor or pituitary cancer.

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