Benign tumors are noncancerous growths in the body. Unlike cancerous tumors, they don’t spread (metastasize) to other parts of the body.

Benign tumors can form anywhere. If you discover a lump or mass in your body that can be felt from the outside, you might immediately assume it is cancerous. For instance, women who find lumps in their breasts during self-examinations are often alarmed. However, most breast growths are benign. In fact, many growths throughout the body are benign.

Benign growths are extremely common, with 9 out of 10 womenTrusted Source showing benign breast tissue changes. Benign bone tumors, similarly, have a higher prevalence than malignant bone tumors.

**Causes of benign tumors**

The exact cause of a benign tumor is often unknown. It develops when cells in the body divide and grow at an excessive rate. Typically, the body is able to balance cell growth and division. When old or damaged cells die, they are automatically replaced with new, healthy cells. In the case of tumors, dead cells remain and form a growth known as a tumor.

Cancer cells grow in the same manner. However, unlike the cells in benign tumors, cancerous cells can invade nearby tissue and spread to other parts of the body.

**Symptoms of benign tumors**

Not all tumors, cancerous or benign, have symptoms.

Depending on the tumor’s location, numerous symptoms could affect the function of important organs or the senses. For example, if you have a benign brain tumor, you may experience headaches, vision trouble, and fuzzy memory.

If the tumor is close to the skin or in an area of soft tissue such as the abdomen, the mass may be felt by touch.

Depending on the location, possible symptoms of a benign tumor include:

* chills
* discomfort or pain
* fatigue
* fever
* loss of appetite
* night sweats
* weight loss

**Diagnosis of benign tumors**

Doctors use a variety of techniques to diagnose benign tumors. The key in diagnosis is determining if a tumor is benign or malignant. Only laboratory tests can determine this with certainty.

Your doctor may begin by performing a physical examination and collecting your medical history. They’ll also ask you about the symptoms you’re experiencing.

If you don’t already have a primary care provider, you can browse doctors in your area through the Healthline FindCare tool.

Many internal benign tumors are found and located by imaging tests, including:

* CT scans
* MRI scans
* mammograms
* ultrasounds
* X-rays

Benign tumors often have a visual border of a protective sac that helps doctors diagnose them as benign. Your doctor may also order blood tests to check for the presence of cancer markers.

In other cases, doctors will take a biopsy of the tumor to determine whether it’s benign or malignant. The biopsy will be more or less invasive depending on the tumor’s location. Skin tumors are easy to remove and only require a local anesthetic, while colon polyps would require a colonoscopy, for example, and a stomach tumor may require an endoscopy.