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Glomus tympanum tumor

A glomus tympanum tumor is a tumor of the middle ear and bone behind the ear (mastoid).

Causes

A glomus tympanum tumor grows in the temporal bone of the skull, behind the eardrum (tympanic membrane).

This area contains nerve fibers (glomus bodies) that normally respond to changes in body temperature or blood pressure.

These tumors most often occur late in life, around age 60 or 70, but they can appear at any age.

The cause of a glomus tympanum tumor is unknown. In most cases, there are no known risk factors. Glomus tumors have been associated with changes (mutations) in a gene responsible for the enzyme succinate dehydrogenase (SDHD).

Symptoms

Symptoms may include:

- Hearing problems or loss
- Ringing or heart beat sounds in the ear (pulsatile tinnitus)
- Weakness or loss of movement in the face (facial nerve palsy)

Exams and Tests

Glomus tympanum tumors are diagnosed by a physical exam. They may be seen in the ear or behind the eardrum.

Diagnosis also involves scans, including:

- CT scan
- MRI scan

Treatment

Glomus tympanum tumors are rarely cancerous and do not tend to spread to other parts of the body. However, treatment may be needed to relieve symptoms.

Outlook (Prognosis)

People who have surgery usually do well. More than 90% of people with glomus tympanum tumors are cured.

Possible Complications

The most common complication is hearing loss.

Nerve damage, which may be caused by the tumor itself or damage during surgery, rarely occurs. Nerve damage can lead to facial paralysis.

When to Contact a Medical Professional

Contact your health care provider if you notice:

- Difficulty with hearing or swallowing
- Problems with the muscles in your face
- Pulsing sensation in your ear

Alternative Names

Paraganglioma - glomus tympanum

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