



THE CANCER  
SOCIETY OF  
THE BAHAMAS

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## *Brain Cancer Awareness*

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Due to genetic changes, cells can grow abnormally in or near the brain, resulting in the formation of a brain tumor. According to Dr. Burrowes, brain tumors can be benign (noncancerous), meaning they grow slowly and stay within a localized area. However, when brain tumors grow and spread rapidly, they are known as brain cancers.

### **Types of Brain Cancers**

Brain cancers are classified as primary or secondary, explains Dr. Burrowes. While primary brain cancers originate in the brain, secondary brain cancers reach the brain from somewhere else, like the lung, breast, skin, or kidney.

Some of the most common types of primary brain cancers, as listed by Dr. Burrowes, are:

- Gliomas and related brain tumors - start in the cells that surround and support nerve cells in the brain tissue.
- Choroid plexus tumors - start in cells that make the fluid that surrounds the brain and spinal cord.
- Embryonal tumors - begin in cells that are left over from fetal development.
- Pineal tumors - begin in and around the brain's pineal gland.
- Germ cell tumors - start in reproductive cells that later become sperm and egg cells.
- Nerve tumors - grow in or around the nerves.
- Pituitary tumors - begin in and around the pituitary gland.
- Meningiomas - start in the membranes around the brain and spinal cord.



Dr. Nicholas Burrowes  
Consultant Neurosurgeon

### **Symptoms**

Depending on the size, location, and growth rate of the tumor, Dr. Burrowes says that an individual with brain cancer may experience the following symptoms:

- headaches
- seizures

- problems with balance and coordination
- weakness on one side or part of the body
- nausea and vomiting
- confusion, drowsiness, and fatigue
- dizziness or loss of consciousness
- blurred vision

In comparison to benign brain tumors, the symptoms of brain cancer appear suddenly and worsen quickly, often within a few days or weeks. Headaches, the most common symptom of brain cancer, occur when swelling in the brain increases pressure in the head.

### **Risk Factors**

While secondary brain cancers are the result of malignancies spreading to the brain from other areas of the body, in most cases, the cause of primary brain cancer development is not clear. However, some factors may raise someone's risk.

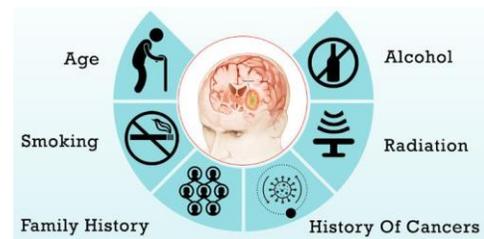
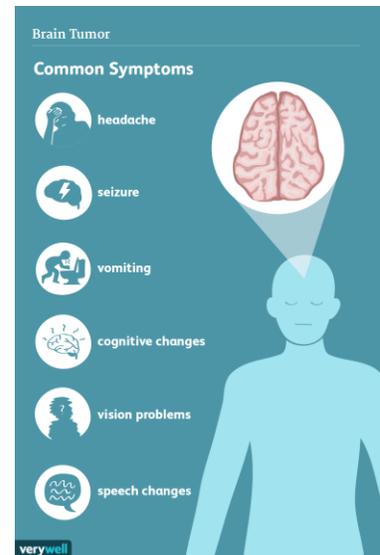
Some of these risk factors, as outlined by Dr. Burrowes, are:

- increased age, though some brain cancers mainly affect young children
- exposure to radiation
- inherited syndromes, such as Neurofibromatosis, Tuberous Sclerosis, and Li-Fraumeni syndrome
- weakened immune system
- smoking.

### **Screening and Detection**

Currently, there is no standard, routine screening test for brain cancer, notes Dr. Burrowes. After symptoms appear, healthcare providers perform imaging tests to detect abnormalities, which, Dr. Burrowes explains, may include the following:

- MRI (Magnetic Resonance Imaging)
- CT Scan (Computed Tomography).
- PET Scan (Positron Emission Tomography)
- MRS (Magnetic Resonance Spectroscopy)
- SPECT Scan (Single Photon Emission CT)



If abnormalities are detected, healthcare providers will perform a biopsy to make a diagnosis. During a biopsy, a surgeon removes a small tissue sample from the brain for examination, usually under a microscope.

### **Treatment**

Based on the patient's health and the nature of the tumor, Dr. Burrowes explains, doctors use a multidisciplinary approach to brain cancer treatment, which may involve a combination of the following:

- Surgery - removes as much of the tumor as safely as possible, reducing pressure and relieving symptoms
- Radiation therapy - uses high-energy rays (X-rays, protons) to kill cancer cells
- Chemotherapy - uses drugs, either given orally or injected directly into the spinal fluid, to destroy cancer cells
- Targeted therapy - uses drugs that stop the growth of specific cells.

### **Can Brain Cancer Be Prevented?**

Since there is no single, definitive cause of brain cancer, there is no sure way to prevent it, notes Dr. Burrowes. However, he explains that you can lower your risk by implementing healthy lifestyle changes and taking health precautions, including:

- Eating a healthy diet rich in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and lean protein.
- Exercising regularly
- Limiting alcohol consumption
- Not smoking
- Avoiding unnecessary radiation
- Getting adequate sleep
- Managing stress.

In addition, if you're at an increased risk of brain cancer, Dr. Burrowes recommends scheduling regular physical exams and imaging scans, as they can potentially detect any abnormalities early.

### **What is the Cancer Society doing to help?**

Through advocacy, providing free cancer screening tests, and assisting with patient support, the Cancer Society ensures that Bahamians can prevent cancer, detect and treat it early, and survive it.

The programs and services available at the Cancer Society include:

- Cancer Caring Centre – provides free accommodations for Family Islanders undergoing cancer treatment in New Providence.
- Adult Support Group – offers emotional and mental support.

- Freedom Kids Club – helps children diagnosed with cancer live normal childhoods by holding events catered to their disease.
- Assist with Port-a-Caths and port needles.

To learn more about our work or how you can get involved, visit [www.cancersocietybahamas.org/newsletter](http://www.cancersocietybahamas.org/newsletter), call us at (242) 323-4441 or (242) 323-4482, or email us at [info@cancersocietybahamas.org](mailto:info@cancersocietybahamas.org). Whether as a volunteer, spokesperson, or advocate, your involvement can make a difference in creating a healthier Bahamas.