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INCIDENCE AND PREVALENCE

Brain tumors are growths within the cranium, including tumors in brain tissue, meninges, pituitary gland, or blood vessels. Brain tumors may be benign or malignant, primary or metastatic, and intracerebral or extracerebral. Regardless of type or location, brain tumors are potentially lethal as they grow within a closed cranial vault and displace or impinge on CNS structures.

An estimated 17,000 new cases of malignant brain tumors are diagnosed in the United States each year (American Cancer Society, 2001). In addition, more than 100,000 people die each year from metastatic brain tumors (Porth, 2002). Although brain tumors can occur in any age group, the highest incidence is among young children and among adults ages 50 to 70. In the adult population, the most common tumor is glioblastoma multiforme, followed by meningioma and cytoma. Glioblastomas represent more than 50% of all primary intracranial lesions.

The cause of many brain tumors is unknown. Although a number of chemical and viral agents can cause brain tumors in laboratory animals, there is no evidence that these agents cause tumors in humans. Other factors associated with brain tumors include heredity, cranial irradiation, and exposure to some chemicals (Porth, 2002).