

Bone Tumors

Most bone tumors are benign—or non-cancerous—and are usually not dangerous. On the other hand, some bone tumors are malignant—or cancerous—and can be life threatening. Malignant bone tumors are rare, accounting for only 5 percent of all cancers in children and 1 percent of all cancers in adults.

Bone tumors are usually classified according to their cells of origin. For example, a lump arising from bone cells is called an osteoma and may be either benign or malignant. A common type of benign tumor growing on the outside of a bone is called an exostosis. Other examples of benign bone tumors are chondromas, which arise from cartilage, and fibromas, which arise from fibrous cells.

Benign bone tumors usually grow more slowly than malignant tumors and rarely cause pain— unless they happen to weaken the bone itself. If the bone does become weakened and subsequently breaks as a result, it is referred to as a pathological fracture. Also, a benign bone lesion is usually firm and is not tender to the touch.

On the other hand, malignant bone tumors usually grow more rapidly than benign bone tumors and tend to progressively cause more bone pain. When such a tumor is close to a joint, it can restrict the motion of that joint and cause considerable pain, indeed. Like the benign bone tumor, a malignant tumor can cause pathological fractures. Unlike the benign bone tumor, however, the swelling of a malignant tumor is usually tender or painful to the touch.

If you have any unexplained bone swelling or progressive bone pain, call your health care professional immediately. Regardless of whether you believe that it is benign or malignant, it should be treated. The diagnosis of a bone tumor depends on the history of its development, a doctor's physical examination, X-rays, and other studies. Frequently, an X-ray can make the diagnosis. Sometimes additional procedures are required, such as blood tests, a CT scan, an MRI, or a biopsy. A biopsy is a surgical procedure where a small amount of bone is removed so that it can be further examined under a microscope.

Typically, treatment depends on the type of the tumor. No treatment or only minor surgery is frequently recommended. Sometimes radiation therapy is used—even if the tumor is benign. For more serious conditions, a team of doctors may work together to provide the best treatment for a cure. This type of combination treatment may include surgery, radiation and/or chemotherapy.

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This information is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other medical professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have additional questions, please consult with your doctor.