

Incidentalomas

What is an incidentaloma?

An incidentaloma (IN-suh-den-tul-OH-muh) is something unexpected that shows up when an MRI or CT scan is done to look for something else. For example, if you have a CT scan because your doctor is worried about appendicitis, the scan might also show kidney cysts or liver spots.

How common are they?

Incidentalomas are becoming more common. MRI and CT scans help doctors diagnose medical problems, but they also increase the chance of finding incidentalomas that otherwise might not be noticed.

Should I be concerned about cancer?

Most incidentalomas are not dangerous. They are typically cysts, growths, or enlarged blood vessels that only rarely lead to cancer. Your doctor may ask you about your medical history to find out your risk of cancer.

What should I do next?

You and your doctor may decide that nothing else needs to be done. You might need scans to check whether it has grown, or your doctor might want you to have a biopsy. Having more scans or biopsies can sometimes cause

problems, so you and your doctor need to decide whether it is worth it to make sure that the incidentaloma is not dangerous.

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Notes:

This handout is provided to you by your family doctor and the American Academy of Family Physicians. Other health-related information is available from the AAFP online at <http://familydoctor.org>.

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