

Prolactinoma

What is a prolactinoma?

A prolactinoma (pro-LACK-tin-OH-muh) is a type of tumor that affects your pituitary (pih-TWO-uh-TAYR-ee). The pituitary is a small gland at the base of your brain. It helps to regulate hormone levels in your body. A prolactinoma may cause the pituitary to make too much of a hormone called prolactin.

What are the symptoms?

A prolactinoma can cause many symptoms. You may lose interest in sex. Your nipples may leak fluid. Women may not be able to get pregnant or have children. Men may have trouble getting an erection. Women who have not gone through menopause can have changes in their menstrual cycle. If the tumor gets bigger, it can cause headaches and changes in your ability to see.

How is it diagnosed?

Your doctor will run some tests to see if you have a prolactinoma. He or she may check your blood, urine, and hormone levels. Your doctor also may order a magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) test or a computed tomography (CT) scan to take pictures of the inside of your brain.

How is it treated?

Medicines called dopamine agonists can shrink the tumor and stop it from making so much prolactin. If the tumor is too big or if the medicines don't work, you may need surgery.

Depending on the size of the tumor and your symptoms, you may not need treatment. If you decide not to treat your tumor, be sure to see your doctor every six to 12 months. Your doctor can watch the tumor to see if it's getting bigger or causing you any problems. Be sure to talk with your doctor about all of your options before you decide what to do.

Where can I find out more?

Your doctor

National Endocrine and Metabolic Diseases
Information Service

<http://endocrine.niddk.nih.gov/pubs/prolact/prolact.aspx>

The Pituitary Society

<http://www.pituitarysociety.org/public/faq/prolactinomafaq.aspx>

September 2013

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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