



A Pea That Packs a Punch

The pituitary is a gland. It is found at the base of your brain. It is only about the size of a large pea. Glands make **hormones** and hormones help your body work right. The pituitary gland is the “master gland.” It rules over other glands (for example, the thyroid and adrenal glands) and most body functions. Look at the many things this master gland controls:

- Birth
- Blood pressure
- “Fight or flight” response
- Growth
- Memory
- Milk production
- Sexual function
- Skin color
- Sleep
- Sperm and egg production
- Thyroid gland
- Water and food intake
- Water balance

For More Information

American Association of Clinical Endocrinologists
(www.aace.com)

Provides information about endocrine disorders and helps you locate an endocrinologist in your area.

The Hormone Foundation (www.hormone.org)

Addresses general questions about various pituitary tumors, medical treatments, and hormone replacement therapy.

MEDLINEplus® Health Information

(www.medlineplus.gov)

Has a medical encyclopedia that contains facts about pituitary disorders in general.

National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) (www.nichd.nih.gov)

Conducts research on the various processes that determine and maintain the health of individuals, families, and populations.

National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (NIDDK) (www.niddk.nih.gov)

Provides links to national organizations serving patients concerned about endocrine and metabolic diseases.

Pituitary Network Association (www.pituitary.org)

Provides information about ongoing clinical trials, medical resources and terminology, and links to other organizations.



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Is it all
in your head?

PITUITARY DISORDERS



“It’s All in Your Head”

How many times have you heard that? Or how about “Get a grip.” “Stop complaining.” “It’s nothing a good diet and exercise won’t fix.” “I’m sure it’s just stress.” “You’re too emotional.”

You’ve probably heard these phrases and many more. You feel no one is really listening to the **REAL** problems you have. Actually, it may be all in your head—more specifically—just below your brain. There could be a **REAL** reason for your assorted complaints. It could be your **pituitary gland**, which *would* make it all in your head.

“I have a sick mind
and a sick body.
I’m sick of being sick.”



When the Thermostat Goes Berserk

Think of the pituitary gland as a multipurpose thermostat. The thermostat where you live turns the heat on and off when it is cold. Similarly, the pituitary gland watches over your body. It sends out signals when things need to be changed. But sometimes this gland does not function correctly: the body gets upset and things go “berserk.”

The pituitary gland can fail when a **tumor** grows on it. This is called a pituitary tumor. These tumors are typically **benign**, which means they are not cancerous. But that doesn't mean they can't cause trouble. Check out this list of problems a benign pituitary tumor can cause:

- Aching joints
- Carpal tunnel syndrome
- Depression
- Diabetes
- Early menopause
- Easy bruising
- Excessive hair growth or loss
- Extreme weight gain
- Fatigue
- Headaches
- Hypertension
- Infertility
- Loss of vision
- Milk leaking from breasts
- Mood swings
- Muscle weakness
- Osteoporosis
- Painful intercourse
- Poor growth
- Severe mood swings
- Sexual problems
- Stopped menstrual periods
- Weak bones

“I’m fat, tired, depressed, and sick all the time.”



The Big Myth

No one really talks about pituitary tumors. Many family doctors don't know much about them. But they aren't rare.

- Almost 1 in every 5 people will get a pituitary tumor. That's about 20% of the population
- Many think these tumors are harmless; some are
- Some tumors are tiny; some are large
 - Although many of these tumors probably don't cause any problems, some do
 - A few pituitary tumors kill. Usually this is because it wasn't found early enough to fix or wasn't treated by experts

“No one listens, no one understands.”

A Needle in a Haystack

Finding a problem with the pituitary gland can be like looking for a needle in a haystack. There are many kinds of pituitary tumors. Each kind of tumor causes a different set of symptoms. There are many, many symptoms. Often these symptoms are like those of other diseases. The doctor who specializes in treating pituitary problems is called an **endocrinologist**. If you have symptoms like the ones listed in this brochure, you may need to see an endocrinologist. Better yet, see an endocrinologist who knows a lot about pituitary disorders. You can find a list of endocrinologists on the Internet at www.pituitary.org.



Resetting the Thermostat

Pituitary tumors can be treated. You may need surgery to take out the tumor, medications to treat the tumor, or x-rays to the pituitary gland to kill the tumor cells. You also may need to take medications for the rest of your life to control growth of the tumor and to replace hormones made by the pituitary gland. Remember, lots of people take these medications. These drugs will make you feel a lot better, and they are safe when the correct medication is prescribed. Hormones may be given to replace those your body uses and makes naturally when your pituitary gland works normally.

A team of specialists can help you diagnose and fix the problem:

- An endocrinologist: a doctor who specializes in disorders of the glands
- A neurosurgeon: a surgeon who removes tumors of the brain and pituitary gland
- A radiologist: a doctor who specializes in reading medical images
- A radiation oncologist: a doctor who specializes in x-ray therapy

Further Adjustments

Many people with pituitary tumors have struggled for years trying to get a proper diagnosis. They may be frustrated, tired, and emotionally exhausted. Pituitary tumors often cause emotional problems. Your family life may be strained. You may have lost a job. People with pituitary tumors need emotional support. You can get this from a psychiatrist (a doctor who prescribes medications for emotional distress), a psychologist (a specialist who helps you cope with your disease), and a support group, such as the Pituitary Network Association.



Being Your Own Best Friend

Maybe it is all in your head—specifically, in that pea-sized organ called the pituitary gland. It is time to find out for sure. Now is the time to be your own best friend and take steps toward better health.

Step 1: Get Informed. Find out all you can about the disorder. Speak out for your own health.

Step 2: Get Diagnosed. Make an appointment to see a specialist. Explain your problem and your symptoms. Get another opinion if you have to.

Step 3: Get Going. Pituitary disorders can be treated. So take steps toward recovering and improving your health.

Glossary

benign - Not malignant, not cancerous.

endocrinologist - A doctor specializing in diseases of the endocrine glands and their hormones.

gland - An organ of the body that produces substances (hormones), which are released into the bloodstream. An example is the pituitary gland.

hormones - “Chemical messengers” that are made and released by endocrine glands and that target one or more parts of the body.

pituitary gland - Master gland of the endocrine system that produces several hormones.

tumor - An abnormal growth that may be cancerous or noncancerous depending on the cell type. It may cause visual impairment or may be life-threatening depending on the location.