

# Infant Neuroblastoma – the basics

**Disclaimer:** This fact sheet is for education purposes only. Please consult with your doctor or other health professional to make sure this information is right for your child.

This information sheet will tell you in simple terms:

- What is a neuroblastoma?
- Why did the neuroblastoma happen?
- How did we find the neuroblastoma?
- How do we treat neuroblastoma?

## What is a neuroblastoma?

A **neuroblastoma** is a type of cancer - a lump of cells (tumour) which should not be there. Neuroblastoma is a cancer that only children get. It starts from primitive (very simple) nerve cells found in areas where nerves join together. The most common areas where these are found are in the abdomen (especially the **adrenal gland**), chest and neck.

## Why did the neuroblastoma happen?

Neuroblastoma is the most common type of cancer in babies. In most cases, we do not know why children get a neuroblastoma.

## How did we find the neuroblastoma?

With a neuroblastoma, the problems depend on where the cancer is. With babies, sometimes a lump has been noticed on the ultrasound screen before the baby is born. In other cases, a lump is noticed when a scan is performed for other reasons. Sometimes, there is a **lump** which can be seen or felt. Some children lose their appetite and start to **lose weight**, or appear to have **pain** in their abdomen.

The neuroblastoma cancer cells might spread to other areas of the body and cause problems there.

## How do we treat neuroblastoma?

The treatment of each person with a neuroblastoma is different. In most cases, a **paediatric oncologist** (a doctor who treats children with cancer) will develop the best treatment for your child, together with other specialists. This usually is a **paediatric surgeon** (a surgeon who operates on children).

Your oncologist is: \_\_\_\_\_

Your surgeon is: \_\_\_\_\_

In the first days after the diagnosis of neuroblastoma is made, many **scans** will be done to find exactly **where** the cancer is, usually a CAT scan, an ultrasound, and some nuclear medicine scans (bone scan, gallium scan, MIBG scan). Some **blood tests** and a **urine test** will also be done. These tests allow us to find exactly where the neuroblastoma is, and whether it has spread to other areas in the body.

In some cases, a small amount of **bone marrow** (the liquid part inside bones) will be tested for neuroblastoma cells. Sometimes, the surgeon will perform a small operation (a **biopsy**) to take out a small piece of the neuroblastoma so that the exact type of the cancer is known. This helps in planning the best treatment.

There are three main ways to treat neuroblastoma cancers in children under 1 year old. These are:

- use of drugs which kill cancer cells (**chemotherapy**)
- removal of some or all of the lump with an **operation**
- occasionally, watching carefully to see if the cancer matures without any treatment.

Depending on the type of neuroblastoma, where it is and if it has spread, **some or all** of these ways will be used to treat the cancer.

Your specialists will talk to you about the best way to treat **your** child.

Any questions about this information may be directed to the Oncology Treatment Centre on 9845 2115 (8am-4pm) or Camperdown ward on 9845 1123. Further sheets are available from the Oncology staff or The Children's Hospital at Westmead's website at [www.chw.edu.au](http://www.chw.edu.au). Updated **April 2003**.

**the children's hospital at Westmead**