

Ready to start planning your care? Call us at [800-525-2225](tel:800-525-2225) to make an appointment.

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Memorial Sloan Kettering
Cancer Center

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Neurosurgeon Mark Bilsky is Director of Memorial Sloan Kettering's Multidisciplinary Spine Tumor Service, which evaluates and treats more than 1,500 spine tumors a year.

Each year, more than 1,500 people come to the Multidisciplinary Spine Tumor Service at Memorial Sloan Kettering for expert [diagnosis](#) and [treatment](#) of spine tumors. Our staff includes 11 full-time doctors who are recognized leaders in [neurosurgery](#), radiation oncology, interventional neuroradiology, and physiatry. Each one is a specialist in not only the spine but specifically tumors of the spine, giving our team unparalleled expertise in the field.

Request an Appointment

Call [212-639-6506](tel:212-639-6506)

Available Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. (Eastern time)

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Call us when you're ready to make an appointment: We will do our best to see you within 48 hours. Our experts work together so that you see multiple specialists in one day. We don't want you to have to come back and forth for appointments.

We know you have a lot of questions. These answers might help. If you are wondering about anything not listed below, give us a call. We're here to help you make sense of your next steps forward.

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1. What are spine tumors and spinal cancer?

Spine tumors can develop in the bones, nerves, and other tissues that make up the spine. Fewer than 10 percent of spine tumors begin in the spine. The ones that do are called primary tumors. They can be benign (noncancerous) growths, low-grade malignant (cancerous) tumors that grow slowly, or high-grade tumors that grow aggressively. Most spine tumors are metastatic, which means they spread from cancer in a different part of the body.

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2. What are the signs and symptoms of spine tumors?

As a spine tumor grows, it can weaken bones and compress the spinal cord and nerves, resulting in spine fractures and neurologic injuries. Often, the first symptom of a spine tumor is the pain you feel because of these changes. The type of pain can provide important information about the tumor.

Pain mainly when you sit or stand usually means that the tumor is causing weakness or instability in the bones of your spine. Pain primarily at night or in the early morning that gets better as you move is often the first symptom of a tumor. This pain happens because tumors create a great deal of inflammation, and your adrenal gland does not make steroids when you sleep.

Spine tumors that are close to major nerves can disrupt their ability to transmit messages between the body and the brain. This can cause neurologic symptoms, including:

- weakness, tingling, or numbness in both legs or arms
- difficulty walking or balancing
- sensory problems
- loss of bowel and bladder control

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3. Am I at risk for a spine tumor?

Scientists don't yet know what exactly causes spine tumors. People with certain immune disorders or genetic conditions, such as neurofibromatosis 2, are more likely to develop spine tumors than other people.

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4. How are spine tumors diagnosed?

If we suspect that you have a spine tumor, we'll first perform a medical exam to assess and understand your symptoms. From there, we will use advanced imaging technologies to identify the size and location of the tumor. This will help us determine the most effective treatment strategy.

[Learn more about how we diagnose spine tumors.](#)

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5. What are the types of spine tumors?

There are many different types of spine tumors, which are [diagnosed](#) and [treated](#) by their location and the type of cells they contain. The experts in our Multidisciplinary Spine Tumor Service have experience in treating all types of spine tumors, even those that are complex and advanced.

Most tumors that begin in the spine or spread from another part of the body are epidural tumors. These tumors grow in the bones of the spine. As they grow, they can compress the spinal cord, nerve roots, and spinal fluid.

Intradural tumors are another type. This group includes:

- intradural tumors that grow within the spinal cord, such as ependymomas and astrocytomas

- extradural tumors that grow outside the spinal cord, such as meningiomas, schwannomas, and myxopapillary ependymomas

Tumors called nerve plexus tumors grow next to the spine in the nerve plexus. They include such tumors as neurofibromas and ganglioneuromas. Some spine tumors, such as astrocytomas, happen more commonly in children and teenagers.

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6. What are the treatments for spine tumors?

There are several ways to treat spine tumors. The method that's right for you depends on where the tumors are located and if the disease has spread. We can use a combination of treatments, including surgery and radiation. The experts at MSK have pioneered the use of sophisticated radiation and surgical techniques to shrink and eliminate tumors, giving you the best possible quality of life. Advances in technology allow our doctors to monitor neurologic function continuously during surgery to avoid injuring the spinal cord. And if radiation is part of your care plan, you can receive that treatment at an [MSK regional location](#) closer to your home.

[Learn more about how we treat spine tumors.](#)



Brain Tumor Remote Second Opinions from Neurosurgeons at MSK

Learn how to get a remote second opinion about your brain cancer or benign tumor diagnosis from MSK neurosurgeons.

[Learn more](#)

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7. How will a spine tumor affect my quality of life?

Everyone at the Multidisciplinary Spine Tumor Service is dedicated to helping you get back to feeling like yourself. We have rehabilitation and pain management experts ready to assist you after treatment. We can help you with the pain, numbness, weakness, and loss of mobility that may result from a spine tumor or its treatment. We also offer emotional support through MSK's [Counseling Center](#) and wellness therapies from [integrative medicine](#) specialists.

[Learn more about living with and beyond spine tumors.](#)

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8. Why should I choose Memorial Sloan Kettering for spine cancer and spine tumor treatment?

MSK is recognized around the world as a leader in pioneering new ways to treat spine cancer and spine tumors. At MSK's Multidisciplinary Spine Tumor Service, we care for people with benign spine tumors, cancers that began in or spread to the spine, and degenerative spinal conditions that have

resulted from cancer or its treatment.

Thanks to innovations from our team, we avoid surgery and use radiation for treatment whenever possible. MSK was one of the earliest adopters of stereotactic radiosurgery for spine tumors. This specialized therapy gives a high dose of radiation in one sitting instead of smaller doses over time. It can spare people surgery and the risks that come with it.

At Memorial Sloan Kettering, our goal is not only to save your life but to help you maintain your quality of life.

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