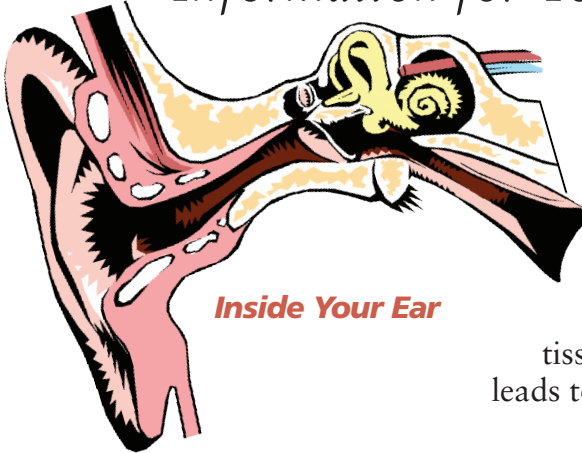




Information for You from Your Health Care Team



Inside Your Ear

What is an Acoustic Neuroma?

An acoustic neuroma (or schwannoma) is a tumor of one of the nerves that leads from your brain to your ear.

This tumor is not a cancer. It does not invade your brain tissue. As it grows, it pushes on other parts in your brain, which leads to problems.

What causes an acoustic neuroma?

There is no known cause and most happen without warning. The tumor is slow growing. Most people find out they have the tumor when they are around 30 to 60 years old.

What are the signs?

Your acoustic nerve has two parts:

- one part that sends sound signals between your ear and brain.
- the other part that helps you with keeping your balance.

The signs that you might have an acoustic neuroma often start with loss of hearing in the ear with the tumor. Sometimes, it sounds like “ear noise” or “ringing in the ear.”

If your tumor keeps growing, it can make it hard to keep your balance when you are trying to walk.

Large tumors can press on other nerves and cause your face to feel numb. They can also press on other important parts of the brain and become harmful to your health.



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How do doctors find an acoustic neuroma?

Special hearing tests are used to check your hearing loss. An MRI (magnetic resonance imaging) is the best way for doctors to find an acoustic neuroma. If an MRI cannot be done, other tests can be done instead.

How is an acoustic neuroma treated?

There are different choices for treatment. Treatment depends on what you and your doctor think is best. Some of these choices are:

- Your doctor may suggest to closely watch how the tumor grows by taking another MRI. You may need more treatment if your hearing loss gets worse. Also, if the tumor gets bigger and presses on other important parts of the brain, you and your doctor may decide you need more treatment.
- Your tumor can be removed by surgery, either part of the tumor or the whole thing. New methods have made this surgery safer in recent years.
- One more choice is radiation, with a special procedure known as the gamma knife. Many beams of radiation are aimed at the tumor, stopping its growth. These beams are very precise so the healthy brain tissue is not harmed. This treatment might be a good choice for patients who may not be able to have surgery for other reasons.

You can discuss with your doctor the treatment that will work best for you.

Where can I find out more about an acoustic neuroma?

- Visit the website www.anausa.org for the Acoustic Neuroma Foundation or call (770) 205-0239.
- The Health Information Center (HIC) is another choice located at the Upstate Medical University library. Staff will be glad to research your health-related topics. Visit HIC at www.upstate.edu/library/hic or call (315) 464-4410.

Speak up if you have any questions or concerns.