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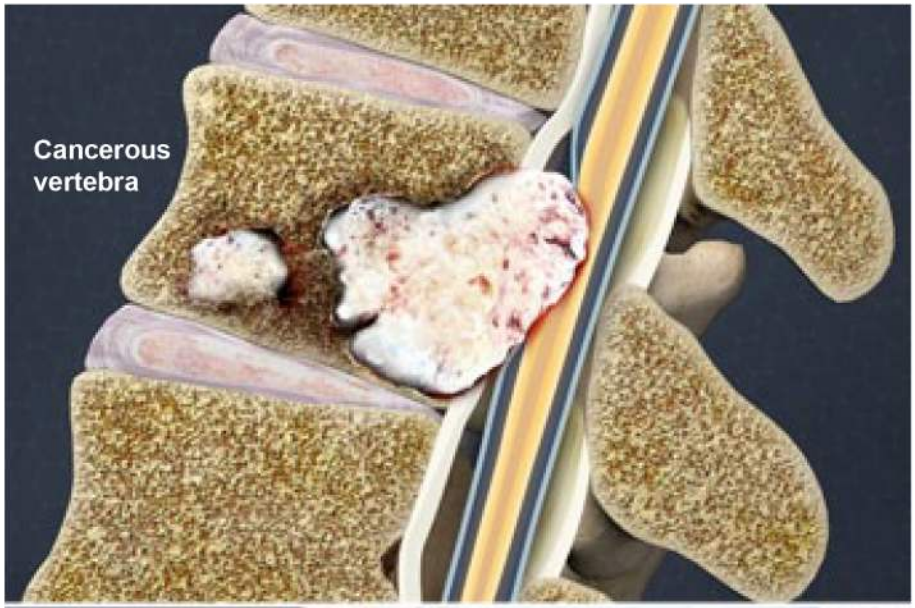
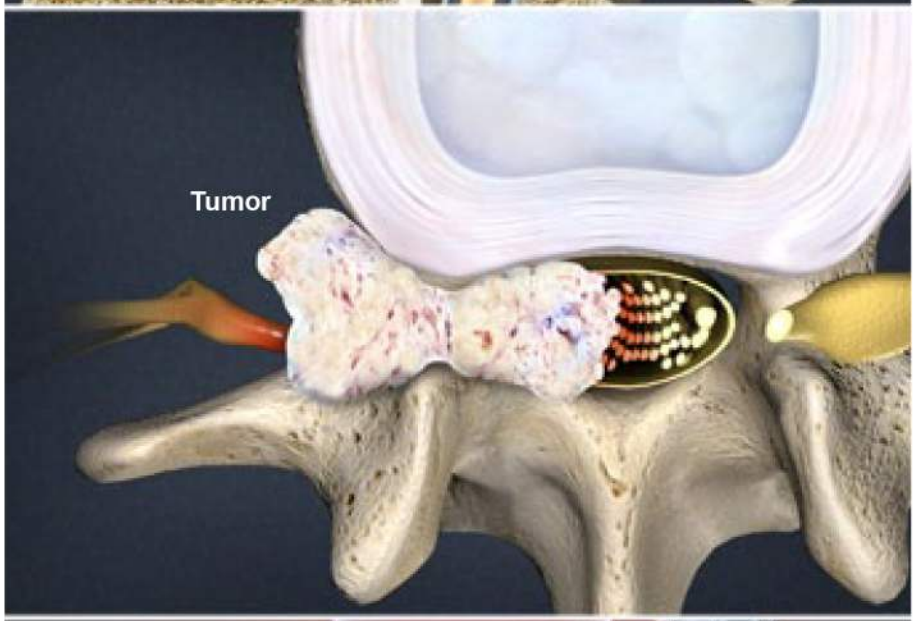
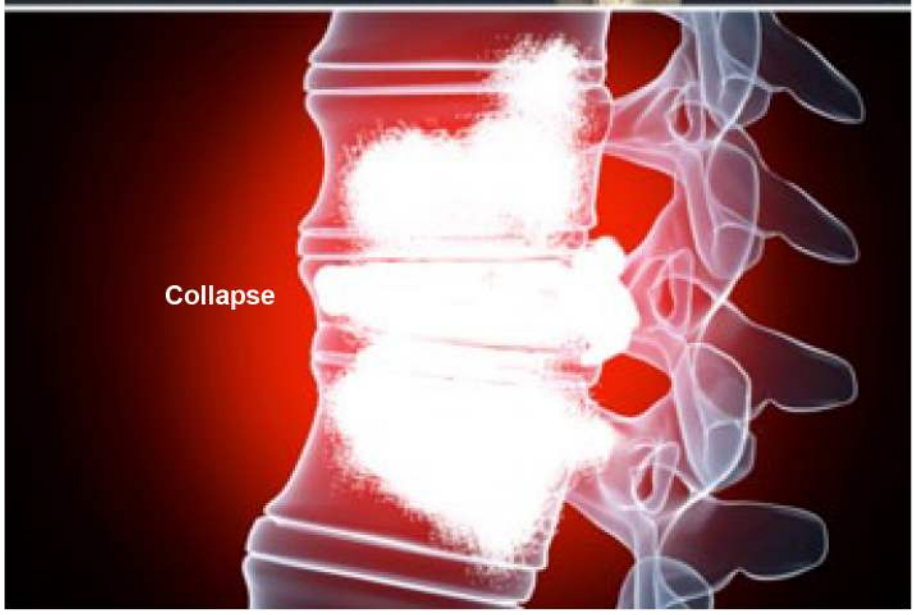
Metastatic Cancer of the Spine







Overview

This form of cancer develops in or near the spinal cord or within the vertebrae. It can spread through multiple levels of the spine. It can lead to a wide range of serious complications.

Causes

Metastatic cancer of the spine results from cancerous cells spreading to the spine from a tumor in another part of the body. Cancerous cells can spread to the spine by traveling through the bloodstream or the lymphatic system. They can also grow directly through the spine's openings.

Damage

When cancerous cells reach the spine, they can invade healthy soft tissue and bone. One or more tumors may grow. A tumor in the spinal canal or foramina can compress the spinal cord and nerve roots. The bone may become cancerous, and it may weaken and collapse. As the cancer progresses, it may spread through the adjoining discs to other levels of the spine.

Complications

Complications vary depending on the characteristics and location of the cancer. A tumor that causes nerve compression or vertebral collapse can result in pain. If not treated, such a tumor may cause a loss of nerve function below the level of the tumor. The person may lose the ability to feel sensation or to move the body below the tumor. The person may lose control of the bladder and bowels. A compression of the spinal cord can be fatal.

Treatment

Treatment options for metastatic cancer of the spine may include monitoring, medications, and surgery to remove the tumor. A treatment plan may also include options such as radiation therapy, stereotactic radiosurgery or chemotherapy.