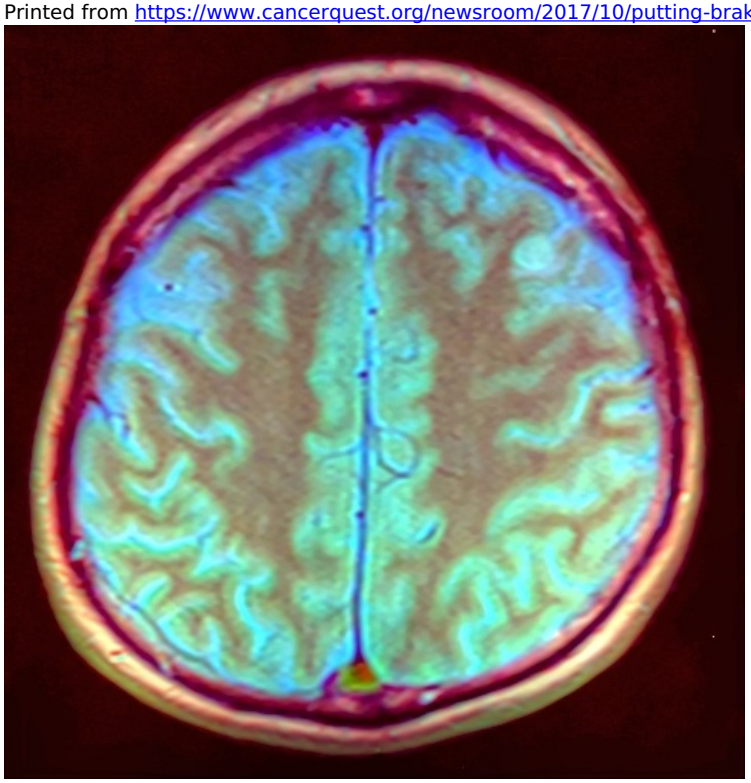
Putting the Brakes on Brain Cancer

Printed from https://www.cancerquest.org/newsroom/2017/10/putting-brakes-brain-cancer on 11/23/2026



Researchers at Stanford’s School of Medicine have discovered that by blocking a molecule found in nerves, they can pause the growth of brain cancer. The protein, called neuroligin-3, plays a role in healthy brain function, but has also been linked to cancer growth.

The researchers bred mice that were genetically altered, and did not produce neuroligin-3.They then implanted human brain tumors in the mice. For the next 4.5 months, the tumors remained, but did not grow. This finding suggests that neuroligin-3, a normally helpful molecule, can be used by tumors to speed cancer growth. However, after 4.5 months, the cancer changed and no longer needed neuroligin-3 to grow.

Clinical trials using neuroligin-3 inhibitors to treat cancer are currently underway.

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