

Testicular Cancer

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Testicular cancer is cancer of one or both of the male sex glands called testicles. The testicles are located under the penis in a sac-like pouch called the scrotum. They produce sperm for reproduction and hormones that control male characteristics.

Testicular cancer accounts for only 1 percent of cancers in males. It is the most common form of cancer among 15- to 35-year-old males.

Risk Factors

The direct causes of testicular cancer are not known. However, research shows there are several factors that can increase a man's risk of developing it.

- undescended testicle: a testicle that did not descend into the scrotum before birth. Surgery to correct this condition may reduce the risk.
- abnormal testicular development
- Klinefelter's syndrome: a chromo-some disorder that may cause low levels of male hormones, sterility, breast enlargement and small testicles
- history of testicular cancer: cancer in one testicle increases the risk of cancer in the other testicle.

Symptoms

Most males who develop testicular cancer discover it themselves. Sometimes doctors find it during routine physicals. If it is found early, it has a high cure rate (approaching 100 percent) and may require less aggressive treatment.

See a doctor if you have any of these symptoms:

- a painless lump or swelling in either testicle
- any enlargement of a testicle or a change in the way it feels
- a feeling of heaviness in the scrotum
- a dull ache in the abdomen or the groin (the area where the thigh meets the abdomen)
- a sudden collection of fluid in the scrotum
- pain or discomfort in a testicle or in the scrotum.

It is important to have a doctor determine whether the symptoms are caused by cancer or by other conditions.

Monthly Self Exam

The best way to detect testicular cancer early is to do a simple self-exam each month. Gently roll each testicle between the thumb and fingers of both hands. If you find any hard lumps or nodules, see a doctor right away.

Diagnosis

A doctor first performs a physical exam. If cancer is suspected, the doctor may do one or more of the following tests:

- blood tests to determine the possible presence of a tumor
- ultrasound to produce a picture of the scrotum including any mass that may be present
- biopsy to remove testicular tissue for lab tests. This is the only sure way to know if cancer is present. It nearly always involves removing the entire affected testicle.

Treatment

Most testicular cancer can be cured with surgery, radiation therapy, chemotherapy or all. Surgery to remove the affected testicle is the preferred treatment.

Loss of one testicle will not:

- affect a male's ability to have sexual intercourse
- make a male sterile (unable to produce children).

Radiation therapy is usually aimed at lymph nodes in the abdomen when cancer cells are suspected.

Chemotherapy is used to kill cancer cells throughout the body if the cancer has spread.

Information adapted from the National Cancer Institute of the National Institutes of Health.