

About Testicular Cancer - A Quick Guide



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This is a brief summary of the information on 'About testicular cancer' from CancerHelp UK. You will find more detailed information on the website.

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The testicles

The testicles are two small oval shaped organs which hang below the penis in a pouch of skin called the 'scrotum'. They are part of the male reproductive system. From the age of puberty the testicles produce sperm which can fertilise the female egg.

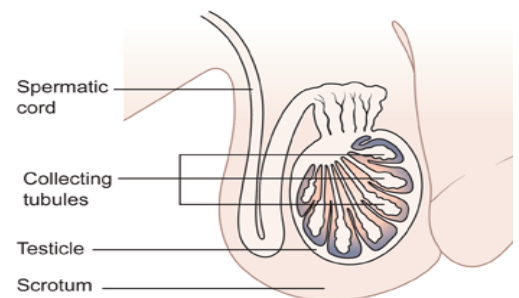


Diagram of the testicles
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The testicles also produce the hormone 'testosterone'. Testosterone is the main cause of male qualities such as deep voice and beard growth. It also controls the ability to have an erection and sex drive (libido).

Testicular cancer symptoms

The most common symptom of testicular cancer is a lump or swelling in part of one testicle. But most testicular lumps are NOT cancer.

A lump that is cancer can be as small as a pea, or may be much larger. It is not usually painful, but some men have a dull ache in the affected testicle, or in their lower abdomen. Your scrotum may feel heavy.



Sometimes testicular cancer cells can spread into lymph glands at the back of the abdomen. This can cause backache.

The cells can also spread to the lymph nodes in the centre of your chest, between the lungs. This could cause a cough, difficulty in breathing or swallowing, and a swelling in your chest. If testicular cancer has spread, there may be lumps in other parts of the body. Around the collarbone, or in the neck for example. These lumps are affected lymph glands.

Testicular cancer can also spread to other organs in the body. If it has spread to the lungs you may have a cough or feel breathless. It is not very common for testicular cancer to spread to other organs apart from the lungs.

Testicular self examination

Cancers found early are the easiest to treat. The best way to check for testicular cancer is to examine yourself once a month after a warm bath or shower, when the scrotal skin is relaxed. Hold your scrotum in the palms of your hands, so that you can use the fingers and thumb on both hands to examine your testicles.

Gently feel each testicle individually. Any noticeable increase in size or weight may mean something is wrong. You should feel a soft tube at the top and back of the testicle, which is normal. The testicle itself should be smooth with no lumps or swellings. If you do find a swelling in your testicle, make an appointment and have it checked by your doctor as soon as possible.

It is unusual to develop cancer in both testicles at the same time, so if you are wondering whether a testicle is feeling

normal or not you can compare it with the other.

Types of testicular cancer

There are two main types of testicular cancer called seminomas and non seminomas. They develop from germ cells in the testes. About 4 out of 10 testicular cancers are pure seminomas. Most of the rest are mixtures of different types of non seminoma testicular cancers. All these testicular cancers are treated in more or less the same way.

Although still rare, the commonest cancer found in the testicles in men over 50 is lymphoma. If you have been diagnosed with a lymphoma in the testicle, then you can find information about treatment in the 'non Hodgkin's lymphoma' section of CancerHelp UK.

Testicular cancer risks and causes

Testicular cancer is a relatively rare disease in the UK. We don't know exactly what causes it but there are several factors that can increase the risk of developing it.

Your medical history

If an undescended testicle is not corrected by the age of 11, a man's risk of testicular cancer is increased. If you have had a rare complication of mumps called orchitis you have an increased risk.

Carcinoma in situ (CIS) means that there are abnormal cells in the testicle. This is not cancer. But if left untreated, it may develop into cancer. Men who have had testicular cancer also have an increased risk of developing cancer in the other testis. There is a small increase in risk in men who've had fertility problems.



Other risk factors

Having a brother with testicular cancer increases risk - researchers think that up to 1 in 5 testicular cancers (20%) could be due to inherited faulty genes.

Ethnic background affects risk. Testicular cancer is diagnosed in 5 times as many white men as black men in the United States. In the UK it is more common in white men than men of other ethnic groups. We don't know why this is.

Should I see a testicular cancer specialist?

It can be very difficult for GPs to decide who may have a suspected cancer and who may have something much less serious. But there are particular symptoms that mean your GP should refer you to a specialist straight away. The National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) have produced guidelines for GPs to help them decide which patients need to be seen urgently by a specialist.

Guidelines for urgent referral

You should ideally get an appointment within 2 weeks for an urgent referral. A swelling or lump in the testicle is the only symptom that the NICE guidelines say needs urgent referral for possible testicular cancer.

Remember - fewer than 4 in 100 testicular lumps are cancer. Your GP may be able to tell that your symptoms are unlikely to be cancer. For example, they may try to shine a strong light through the lump. If it is a harmless fluid-filled cyst the light will pass through. If it is a solid lump, it won't.

What to do if you are worried

If you are concerned that your GP is not taking your symptoms as seriously as you think they should, you could print this page and take it along to an appointment. Ask your GP to talk it through with you.

What to ask your doctor about testicular cancer

- How can I know if I am at risk of getting testicular cancer?
- Will I feel any pain if I have it?
- Can you give me information on testicular self-examination?
- What are the differences between 'seminomas' and 'teratomas'?
- Do both types respond well to treatment?
- What type of testicular cancer do I have?
- I had an undescended testicle: should I be checked for testicular cancer?
- My brother had testicular cancer: should I be checked for testicular cancer?
- I injured a testicle playing football - will this increase my risk of testicular cancer?
- I have fertility problems - does this increase my risk of testicular cancer?



Notes

More information

For more information about testicular cancer, visit our website

<http://cancerhelp.cancerresearchuk.org>

You will find a wide range of detailed, up to date information for people affected by cancer, including a clinical trials database that you can search for cancer trials in the UK. You can view or print the information in a larger size if you need to.

For answers to your questions about cancer call our Cancer Information Nurses on **0808 800 4040** 9am till 5pm Monday to Friday

Adapted from Cancer Research UK's Patient Information Website CancerHelp UK in July 2011. CancerHelp UK is not designed to provide medical advice or professional services and is intended to be for educational use only. The information provided through CancerHelp UK and our nurse team is not a substitute for professional care and should not be used for diagnosing or treating a health problem or disease. If you have, or suspect you may have, a health problem you should consult your doctor. © Cancer Research UK 2011. Cancer Research UK is a registered charity in England and Wales (1089464) and in Scotland (SC041666).