

# About Testicular Cancer

## A Quick Guide

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

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You can view this information in a larger print on our website.

### 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.

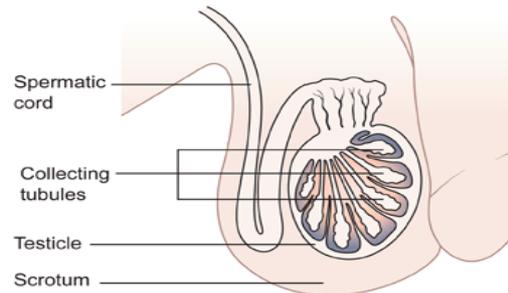


Diagram of the testicles  
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The testicles also produce the hormone testosterone. Testosterone is the main cause of male qualities such as deep voice and beard growth. It also controls the ability to have an erection and sex drive (libido).

### 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. The scrotum is the sack of skin that surrounds the testicles.

Sometimes testicular cancer cells can spread into lymph glands (a network of glands throughout the body) 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, such as around the collarbone, or in the neck. These lumps are lymph glands that contain cancer cells.

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.

### **Finding testicular cancer early**

Cancers found early are the easiest to treat. Being aware of how your testicles look and feel helps you know if there is a change. If you notice a change that isn't normal for you, talk it over with your doctor.

You don't need to check your testicles every day or even every week. It is enough to do it from time to time. It is easiest to check them after a warm bath or shower, when the skin of the scrotum is relaxed. Hold your scrotum in the palms of your hands. You can then use the fingers and thumb on both hands to examine your testicles.

### **What to look out for**

Gently feel each testicle individually. Any noticeable increase in size or weight may mean that 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 2 main types of testicular cancer and they are called seminomas and non seminomas. They develop from germ cells in the testes. About 40 to 45 out of 100 testicular cancers (40 to 45%) are pure seminomas. Most of the rest are mixtures of different types of non seminoma testicular cancer. All these

testicular cancers are treated in more or less the same way.

Lymphoma is the most common other type of cancer found in the testicles in men over 50. If you have been diagnosed with a lymphoma in the testicle, then you need to go to the non Hodgkin's lymphoma section of our website.

### **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, CIS 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 or father with testicular cancer increases the risk. Researchers think that up to 1 in 5 testicular cancers (20%) could be due to inherited gene changes (faults).

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?**

The symptoms of testicular cancer can be similar to other conditions that affect the testes. So 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) has 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 that 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 worried 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 about 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 so should I be checked for testicular cancer?
- My brother had testicular cancer so do I need to be checked?
- I have fertility problems so is my risk of testicular cancer higher than normal?

**For more information**, visit our website <http://www.cruk.org/cancerhelp>

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 trials in the UK. Our information is based on the best current scientific evidence and reviewed regularly by leading clinicians and experts in health and social care.

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

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