

Bitesize Guide to:

Testicular Cancer

Testicular cancer is the most type common cancer in men 15-49 years old. All men should know the symptoms of testicular cancer, as it is relatively easy to diagnose but imperative to diagnose early. Here is our bitesize guide to the condition.

What is it?

The testicles are the two male organs that hang behind the penis, contained in the protective pouch of skin known as the scrotum. Their job is to produce sperm and testosterone. Testicular cancer occurs when cells in the testicles grow and divide in an abnormal and uncontrollable way, causing tumours to form. In some cases, the cancer can spread beyond the testicle to other parts of the body and cause serious harm.

Who gets it?

Most cases of testicular cancer are diagnosed in men between the ages of 15-49.

Why does it happen?

It is unclear what causes cells to become cancerous. However, several factors are thought to put one at greater risk of the disease:

- Undescended testicle - this is when the testicle has not come down from the abdomen into the scrotum within the first year after birth
- Family History - If you or a family member have previous history of testicular cancer
- Age - young to middle-aged men are most at risk
- Ethnic background - a study of men in the UK indicated Caucasian men are at a greater risk of testicular cancer
- Infertility
- Other medical conditions - including HIV/AIDS
- Height - taller men are more likely to develop testicular cancer

Diagnosing Testicular Cancer

If you feel a lump or swelling on one of your testicles, you need to contact your GP for further examination. Your doctor will ask about other symptoms, family history, and will examine your testicles. If they suspect testicular cancer, they will refer you to a hospital specialist. You will then have one or more of the following tests:

- Ultrasound scan - sound waves are used to create a computer image of your testicles.
- Blood tests - testicular cancers sometimes release particular hormones into the blood. High levels of these hormones may lead to a diagnosis.

- Surgery - to confirm a diagnosis of testicular cancer or see how far the cancer has spread, your testicle will be surgically removed to be examined in the lab. This type of surgery is only performed if your doctor is fairly certain that the testicle is cancerous
- Other scans - an MRI scan or chest x-ray is taken to examine the extent of the cancer

Treating Testicular Cancer

Treatment will depend on the type of cancer, how far it has spread, and how likely it is to spread further. Treatment will usually be one or a combination of:

- Orchiectomy - a surgical procedure to remove the whole of the affected testicle. This will be done first no matter what the type or stage of the cancer
- Chemotherapy - medication is given to kill the cancerous cells
- Radiotherapy - radiation is targeted at the cancer cells to destroy them

If the cancer is in its early stages, the removal of the whole testicle may be the only treatment you need. A single dose of chemotherapy may be recommended to ensure that the cancer does not return.

If the cancer has spread to the lymph nodes (bean-shaped glands), you may receive multiple treatments of radiotherapy or chemotherapy, depending on the size of the lymph nodes and type of cancer. As well as the removal of a testicle, you may also have surgery to remove the affected lymph nodes. Similar surgeries are performed if the cancer has spread into other parts of the body.

A recommended treatment plan will be discussed with you. Whether you wish to follow the recommended treatment is entirely your choice.

4 Key Facts about Testicular Cancer

1. Other symptoms include feelings of heaviness in your scrotum, painful testicles, generally feeling unwell, and having a stomach, head, or backache.
2. Removing your testicle will not affect your sex life or your ability to have children.
3. After treatment, you will be monitored for several years to make sure the cancer has not returned.
4. The outlook for testicular cancer patients is very good, with over 95% of cases curable.

If you think you may have testicular cancer, speak to your healthcare professional.

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