

What You Should Know About Testicular Cancer

Is cancer of the testicles common?

Cancer of the testicles accounts for only a small portion--1%--of all cancers in men. It is less common than prostate, lung, or colorectal cancer, but almost always affects young men. The average age at which it is detected is 32 years, but it luckily has a high cure rate.

How can I prevent cancer of the testicles?

When testicular cancer is discovered early, the cure rate is very high. You can help uncover any small tumors by examining your testicles each month. In much the same way as women must perform monthly self-examinations of the breast, men must examine their testicles. Testicular self-examination must become a part of your health care routine.

How should I examine my testicles?

It is helpful to go through this self-examination in detail with your doctor. He or she can point out the structures that you should feel so that you will recognize when something is wrong or you feel a lump. It is also helpful to know how the structures of the testicles are arranged normally.

Examine your testicles at about the same time each month. At the beginning or end of the month is an easy time to remember. Do the exam after a warm bath or shower. Heat relaxes the skin on the scrotum, making it easier to detect an abnormality.

Stand in front of the mirror and look closely for any swelling on the skin of the scrotum. Then examine each testicle. This is best done by placing your hands under the testicle with your thumbs on top. Gently roll the testicle between the thumb and your first two fingers. The normal testicle will feel smooth and egg-shaped and somewhat firm in texture. Don't be alarmed if one testicle feels a little bigger than the other. This is common and natural. Also, don't mistake the comma-shaped, tube like epididymis at the back of the testicles for a lump. The epididymis should feel firm, but not tender. If you still feel unsure about how to do this exam, ask your doctor to explain it more fully to you.

What are the signs of testicular cancer?

The most common sign of testicular cancer is a small, hard lump about the size of a pea. It's usually painless and on the side or front of the testicle.

If you feel a lump or have any questions or suspicions, see your doctor right away. Also let him know if you feel a heaviness in the scrotum, pain in your testicle or in the scrotum, a dull ache in your stomach or groin, a sudden collection of fluid in the scrotum, or enlargement and tenderness of the breasts.

Most important of all: Remember that testicular cancer can almost always be cured, especially if it is detected early.