

Testicular cancer and testicular self-examination

Cancer of the testes is uncommon. It mainly affects younger men. It is most common in men aged between 25 and 44. However, it also sometimes affects men aged over 45 and young men and boys aged under 25.

Do people die from testicular cancer?

In 2004, 194 men and boys were diagnosed with testicular cancer in Victoria. In the same year, two people died from the disease. This shows that testicular cancer is generally cured. In fact, the death rate has fallen by over 50% since 1950, due to improvements in treatment and early detection.

What are the symptoms of testicular cancer?

The main symptom is usually a small hard lump or a slight enlargement or change in the density of the testes. In most cases, only one testicle is affected.

People who find such a change in their testicle should not assume they have cancer. Many conditions other than cancer cause changes in the testicle.

How can a person detect testicular cancer?

A sensible approach for men and boys is to become familiar with the usual level of lumpiness of their testicles and to see their doctor if they notice a change. A good time to examine your testicles is after a warm bath or shower.

Some people need to be especially watchful. They include men and boys with a family history (father or brother) of testicular cancer, and men and boys whose testes did not descend normally when they were babies.

What is the treatment for testicular cancer?

Removing the affected testicle is the usual treatment. In some cases, this may be followed by chemotherapy or radiotherapy.

Early diagnosis and treatment can cure almost all cases of testicular cancer. In most cases, advanced testicular cancer (where the cancer has spread from the place where it began) can also be cured.

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Your sexual function will probably not be affected if your testicle is removed. You should also remain fertile, because so much sperm is still produced by the remaining testicle.

Fertility may be affected in men who need chemotherapy, radiotherapy or more surgery. This is usually temporary. However, if you wish to have children, it is very important that you discuss this with your doctor before treatment, so that you can consider sperm banking.

For more information contact the Cancer Council Helpline on 13 11 20 (cost of a local call). This is a confidential service staffed by cancer nurses. Information is available in languages other than English.

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