Cancer Council Victoria

FactSheet

A fact sheet for people with cancer, their families and friends

Testicular cancer and testicular self-examination

This fact sheet answers some common questions about testicular cancer (cancer of the testicles).

What is testicular cancer?

Testicular cancer is cancer that begins in one of the testicles. The testicles are part of the male reproductive system.

How common is testicular cancer?

Testicular cancer is uncommon. Around 187 men are affected by testicular cancer in Victoria each year.

This cancer mainly affects younger men. It is most common in men aged between 25 and 44. However, it can sometimes affect men of other ages.

Most men diagnosed with testicular cancer will be cured.

Causes

It is not known what causes testicular cancer. Certain factors put men at risk: having an undescended testicle at birth and having a father or brother who has had testicular cancer.

Symptoms

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.

Some men have a dull ache in the affected testicle or your scrotum may feel heavy.

Many testicular cancers make chemicals (hormones) that will show up in a blood test. Doctors call these tumour markers. If your tumour marker levels are abnormal, you could have testicular cancer. But you can have a cancer without raised tumour markers and not all testicular cancers make these markers.

If testicular cancer has spread to other parts of your body you may have other symptoms such as pain or a cough. It is not common for testicular cancer to spread to other parts of the body, except the lungs. In most cases this can be cured.

If you have a symptom, but have not been diagnosed with this cancer, remember that testicular cancer is rare, and your symptom may be due to something else. Most testicular lumps are not cancer. See your doctor if you find a lump on your testicle.

Detection

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.

Treatment

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.

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 short term. 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.

More information and support

For more information and support call **13 11 20** to speak to a cancer nurse, Monday to Friday, 9 am – 5 pm (cost of a local call, except from mobiles).

Reviewed by Annie Angle, cancer nurse, Dip. Oncology Nursing, Royal Marsden, London, October 2012.

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