

Testicular Cancer: Risk Factors and Early Detection



What is a risk factor?

A risk factor is anything that may increase your chance of having a disease. Risk factors for a certain type of cancer might include tobacco use, diet, family history, or many other things. The exact cause of someone's cancer may not be known. But risk factors can make it more likely for a person to have cancer.

Things you should know about risk factors for cancer:

- Risk factors can increase a person's risk, but they don't always cause the disease.
- Some people with risk factors never develop cancer. Other people with cancer have few or no risk factors.
- Some risk factors are very well-known. But there's ongoing research about risk factors for many types of cancer.

Some risk factors, such as family history, may not be in your control. But others may be things you can change. Knowing about risk factors can help you make choices that might lower your risk. For example, if an unhealthy diet is a risk factor, you may choose to eat healthy foods. If excess weight is a risk factor, you may decide to try to lose weight.

Who is at risk for testicular cancer?

Any male can get testicular cancer. But there are some factors that can increase your risk. These include:

- **Undescended testicle.** An undescended testicle (cryptorchidism) is one of the main risk factors for testicular cancer. This risk might be lowered if surgery is done to correct the condition before puberty.
- **Age.** About half of testicular cancers start in the 20s and early 30s. It is the most common cancer in males in this age group. But it can happen at any age.
- **Race and ethnicity.** White males have a higher risk for testicular cancer.
- **Cancer in the other testicle.** Males who have had cancer in one testicle are at higher risk for cancer in the other testicle.
- **Family history.** Males who have a parent or sibling with testicular cancer have a higher risk. But most males who have testicular cancer don't have a family history of the disease.
- **HIV infection.** Males infected with HIV have a higher risk for testicular cancer.

What are your risk factors?

Talk with your healthcare provider about your risk factors for testicular cancer and what you can do about them. Most risk factors for testicular cancer, such as your age and family history, are not under your control.

But if you find testicular cancer early, when it's small and before it has spread, you have the best chance for a cure. There are no blood tests used to screen for testicular cancer in those without symptoms. But doing a testicular self-exam (TSE) regularly may help you find cancer early.

Some healthcare providers advise a TSE once a month. The American Cancer Society (ACS) doesn't advise how often it should be done. The ACS does advise that males to be aware of testicular cancer. See your healthcare provider right away if you notice a lump on the testicle or other symptoms. These include:

- Swelling of or change in a testicle

- Dull ache in the lower belly (abdomen)
- Heavy feeling in the lower belly or scrotum

How to do a testicular self-exam

Get to know the normal size, shape, and weight of your testicles. This will help you notice any changes over time. It's normal for one testicle to be lower or slightly larger than the other.

Healthcare providers advise that males do the exam during or right after taking a shower. This is because your scrotal skin is softer and more relaxed at this time. This makes it easier to feel any changes.

Follow these steps to do a self-exam:

- Using both hands, gently roll each testicle between your fingers.
- Find the epididymis. This is a stringlike structure on the top and back of each testicle. This is a normal part of the testicles.
- Feel for firm areas or lumps under the skin, in the front or along the sides of either testicle. A lump may feel like a kernel of uncooked rice or a small, hard pea.

Have your healthcare provider check any swollen areas or lumps you find.

Changes in the testicles can have causes other than cancer. But it's important to see your healthcare provider if you're unsure about anything you see or feel. Also ask your healthcare provider about testicular exams during your regular checkups. Most healthcare providers agree that examining the testicles should also be part of regular physical exams.

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