

Penile Cancer: Treatment Choices



There are many ways to treat penile cancer. Which may work best for you? It depends on a number of factors. These include the type of penile cancer you have, your test results, the size of the tumor, its location, and whether it has spread beyond the penis. Other factors include your age, overall health, and the side effects you'll find acceptable.

Learning about your treatment choices

You may have questions and concerns about your treatment choices. You may also want to know how you'll feel and how your body will work after treatment. You may want to know if you'll have to change your normal activities.

Your healthcare provider is the best person to answer your questions. They can tell you what your treatment choices are, what outcomes you might expect, and what the risks and side effects are. Your healthcare provider may advise a specific treatment. Or you may be offered more than 1 and have to decide which 1 you'd like. It can be hard to make this decision. It is important to take the time you need to make the best decision.

Deciding on the best plan may take some time. Talk with your healthcare provider about how much time you can take to explore your choices. You may want to get another opinion before deciding on a treatment plan. You may also want to involve your family and friends in this process.

Types of treatment for penile cancer

Treatment for penile cancer is either local or systemic. Local treatments remove, destroy, or control the cancer cells in one area. Surgery, radiation therapy, and topical chemotherapy are local treatments. Systemic treatments, such as chemotherapy, are used to destroy or control cancer cells throughout the entire body.

You may have just 1 of these treatments. Or you may have more than one (combination therapy):

- **Surgery.** This is the most common treatment for penile cancer. The goal of surgery is to remove the tumor and leave as much of the penis as possible. Surgery may also be used to remove nearby lymph nodes. If the cancer has grown deep into the penis, part or all of it may need to be removed. This is called a penectomy.
- **Radiation therapy.** The goal of this treatment is to kill cancer cells by using high energy X-rays. Your healthcare provider may use it as the main treatment for penile cancer instead of surgery, or it may be used along with surgery. You may get it from a machine that directs the beams at the tumor (called external beam radiation therapy). Or radioactive wires or seeds might be put right into the tumor to kill cancer cells. This is called internal radiation or brachytherapy.
- **Chemotherapy.** Depending on the type of tumor, different chemotherapy medicines can be used to treat penile cancer. For very early-stage cancers (those that are small, not deep, and haven't spread), chemotherapy may be put right on the skin as a cream. This is called topical chemotherapy. For advanced cancers, systemic chemotherapy may be used to reach cancer cells throughout the body. It's given by mouth or injected into a vein.

Clinical trials for new treatments

Researchers are always finding new ways to treat cancer. These are tested in clinical trials. Talk with your healthcare provider to find out if you should think about being part of a clinical trial.

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