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Home Illnesses and conditions Cancer Cancer types in adults Penile cancer Penile cancer is a rare type of cancer that occurs on the skin of the penis or within the penis. Over the last 30 years, the number of penile cancer cases has increased by more than 20%, possibly due to changes in sexual practices. However, improvements in diagnosis, staging and treatment have led to a similar reduction in the number of deaths resulting from the condition. You should be aware of any abnormalities or signs of penile cancer, including: If you experience these symptoms, it’s important that they’re checked by your GP as soon as possible. It’s unlikely they’ll be caused by cancer of the penis, but they need to be investigated. Any delay in diagnosing penile cancer could reduce the chances of successful treatment. The penis is made up of many different types of tissue. The type of penile cancer you have will depend on the type of cell the cancer developed from. The most common types of penile cancer include: The Cancer Research UK website has more information about the different types of penile cancer. The cause of penile cancer isn’t known, but certain risk factors can increase your chances of getting it. Men who carry the human papilloma virus (HPV) have an increased risk of developing penile cancer, which is the virus that causes genital warts. Age is also a risk factor for cancer of the penis. The condition rarely affects men and anyone with a penis under 40 years of age. It most commonly occurs in men and anyone with a penis aged over 60. Smoking is the most significant lifestyle factor associated with penile cancer. Chemicals found in cigarettes can damage cells in the penis, which increases your risk of getting the condition. Conditions that affect the penis, such as phimosis, which makes the foreskin difficult to retract, increase your chances of developing infections such as balanitis. Repeated infections are linked to a higher risk of developing some types of penile cancer, because they can weaken your immune system. The Cancer Research UK website has more information about the risks and causes of penile cancer. Your GP will ask you about any symptoms you have and when they occur. They’ll also examine your penis for signs of penile cancer. In 2015, the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) published guidelines to help GPs recognise the signs and symptoms of penile cancer and refer people for the right tests faster. To find out if you should be referred for further tests for suspected penile cancer, read the NICE 2015 guidelines on Suspected Cancer: Recognition and Referral. If your GP suspects penile cancer, they may refer you to a specialist – usually a urologist (a doctor who specialises in conditions that affect the urinary system and genitals). The specialist will ask about your symptoms and check your medical history. They may also check for any physical signs of penile cancer.