

Penile Cancer - Overview [1]

This section has been reviewed and approved by the [Cancer.Net Editorial Board](#) [2], 11/2014

ON THIS PAGE: You will find some basic information about this disease and the parts of the body it may affect. This is the first page of Cancer.Net's Guide to Penile Cancer. To see other pages, use the menu on the side of your screen. Think of that menu as a roadmap to this full guide.

About the penis

The penis is the external genital organ of a man. It is made up of three chambers of spongy tissue that contain smooth muscle and many blood vessels and nerves. The corpora cavernosa makes up two of the chambers that are located on both sides of the upper part of the penis. The corpus spongiosum is located below the corpora cavernosa and surrounds the urethra, the tube through which urine and semen leave the body at an opening called the meatus. At the tip of the penis, the corpora cavernosa expands to form the head of the penis, or glans.

About penile cancer

Cancer begins when normal cells change and grow uncontrollably, forming a mass called a malignant tumor. Malignant means that the tumor is cancerous and can spread to other parts of the body. There are also benign tumors of the penis which are not cancers and do not spread. Penile cancer is a rare form of cancer that occurs mostly in uncircumcised men, meaning they still have the piece of skin called the foreskin covering the head of their penis. Circumcision is the removal of the foreskin and may reduce the risk of penile cancer.

Types of penile cancer

There are several types of penile cancer, including:

Epidermoid/squamous cell carcinoma. Ninety-five percent (95%) of penile cancer is epidermoid, or squamous cell, carcinoma. This means that the cells look like the tissues that make up skin when looked at with a microscope. Squamous cell carcinoma can begin anywhere on the penis; however, it usually develops on or under the foreskin. When found at an early stage, epidermoid carcinoma can usually be cured.

Basal cell carcinoma. Basal cells can sometimes become cancerous. These are round cells

located under the squamous cells in the one of the layers of the skin called the lower epidermis. Basal cell carcinoma is a type of non-melanoma skin cancer [3]. Less than 2% of penile cancers are basal cell cancers.

Melanoma. The deepest layer of the epidermis contains scattered cells called melanocytes, which make the melanin that gives skin color. Melanoma starts in melanocytes, and it is the most serious type of the skin cancer. This cancer sometimes occurs on the surface of the penis. Learn more about melanoma [4].

Sarcoma. About 1% of penile cancers are sarcomas, which are cancers that develop in the tissues that support and connect the body, such as blood vessels, muscle, and fat. Learn more about sarcoma [5].

This section covers cancer that begins in or on the penis. Learn about cancer that starts in the testicles [6] in a separate section of this website.

To continue reading this guide, use the menu on the side of your screen to select another section.

Links:

[1] <http://www.cancer.net/cancer-types/penile-cancer/overview>

[2] <http://www.cancer.net/about-us>

[3] <http://www.cancer.net/node/31378>

[4] <http://www.cancer.net/node/31265>

[5] <http://www.cancer.net/node/31379>

[6] <http://www.cancer.net/node/31375>