Penile Cancer - Diagnosis [1]

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ON THIS PAGE: You will find a list of the common tests, procedures, and scans that doctors can use to find out what?s wrong and identify the cause of the problem. To see other pages, use the menu on the side of your screen.

Doctors use many tests to diagnose cancer and find out if it has spread to another part of the body, called metastasis. Some tests may also determine which treatments are likely to be the most effective. For most types of cancer, a biopsy (see below) is the only way to make a definitive diagnosis of cancer. If a biopsy is not possible, the doctor may suggest other tests that will help make a diagnosis. Imaging tests may be used to find out whether the cancer has spread. This list describes options for diagnosing this type of cancer, and not all tests listed will be used for every person. Your doctor may consider these factors when choosing a diagnostic test:

- Age and medical condition
- Type of cancer suspected
- Signs and symptoms
- Previous test results

In addition to a physical examination, the following tests may be used to diagnose penile cancer:

Biopsy [3]**.** A biopsy is the removal of a small amount of tissue for examination under a microscope. Other tests can suggest that cancer is present, but only a biopsy can make a definite diagnosis. The sample removed during the biopsy is analyzed by a pathologist. A pathologist is a doctor who specializes in interpreting laboratory tests and evaluating cells, tissues, and organs to diagnose disease.

- A fine needle aspiration is a specific type of biopsy. First, the skin is usually made numb with a topical medication that blocks the sensation of pain. Then, a medication is injected into the area near the tumor to prevent pain in tissues beneath the skin. The doctor will then insert a thin needle into the tumor and remove some cells and fluid. The procedure may be repeated two or three times to collect samples from different areas of the tumor. The samples will then be sent to a laboratory, where a pathologist will determine if there are cancer cells in the tissue samples. If cancerous cells are seen, then the biopsy is called positive for cancer. If no cancer is found, then the biopsy is called benign or negative for cancer. Sometimes, the pathologist cannot tell if the cells collected are cancerous, which means the biopsy is called indeterminate or non-diagnostic.
- A sentinel lymph node biopsy is a way to find out if cancer cells have spread to lymph nodes near the penis. In this technique, the doctor removes one or a few sentinel lymph nodes to check for cancer cells. Lymph nodes are the tiny, bean-shaped organs that help fight infection. They are connected to each other by tiny

vessels called lymphatic vessels. Sentinel lymph nodes are the first lymph node(s) into which the lymph from the tumor drains. If there are multiple lymph vessels draining the area where the tumor is located, then there may be more than one sentinel node. For penile cancer, the sentinel lymph nodes are located just under the skin in the groin. If cancer cells are found in these lymph nodes, it means that the cancer is more likely to have spread to other nearby lymph nodes or to other parts of the body through the blood and lymph vessels. Even if cancer cells are not found during a sentinel lymph node biopsy, there is still a chance that the cancer has spread.

Inguinal (groin) lymph node dissection. This is the most accurate way to find out whether the cancer has spread to any lymph nodes near the penis. In this procedure, the lymph nodes near the penis are removed and checked for cancer. This procedure provides more information than the removal of a single lymph node or a group of lymph nodes. However, after this procedure, some men may have problems with wound healing, as well as long-lasting and possibly severe leg swelling, called lymphedema [4]. Research to find ways to prevent these side effects is ongoing (see Latest Research [5]).

X-ray. An x-ray is a way to create a picture of the structures inside of the body, using a small amount of radiation.

Computed tomography (CT or CAT) scan [6]**.** A CT scan creates a three-dimensional picture of the inside of the body with an x-ray machine. A computer then combines these images into a detailed, cross-sectional view that shows abnormalities or tumors. A CT scan can also be used to measure a tumor?s size. Sometimes, a special dye called a contrast medium is given before the scan to provide better detail on the image. This dye can be injected into a patient?s vein or given as a pill to swallow. A CT scan helps find out if the cancer has spread to lymph nodes in the groin, pelvis, and the abdomen and also allows the doctor to see if the cancer has spread to the lungs, liver, and other tissues.

Magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) [7]**.** An MRI uses magnetic fields, not x-rays, to produce detailed images of the body. MRI can also be used to measure the tumor?s size. A special dye called a contrast medium is given before the scan to create a clearer picture. This dye can be injected into a patient?s vein or given as a pill to swallow.

After diagnostic tests are done, your doctor will review all of the results with you. If the diagnosis is cancer, these results also help the doctor describe the cancer; this is called staging.

The next section helps explain the different stages for this type of cancer. Use the menu on the side of your screen to select Stages, or you can select another section, to continue reading this guide.

Links:
[1] http://www.cancer.net/cancer-types/penile-cancer/diagnosis
[2] http://www.cancer.net/about-us
[3] http://www.cancer.net/node/24406
[4] http://www.cancer.net/node/25250
[5] http://www.cancer.net/node/19532
[6] http://www.cancer.net/node/24486
[7] http://www.cancer.net/node/24578