

Testicular Cancer

■ What is testicular cancer?

Testicular cancer begins when healthy cells in 1 or both testicles change and grow out of control, forming a mass called a tumor. Most testicular tumors develop in germ cells, which produce sperm. These tumors are called germ cell tumors and are divided into 2 types: seminoma or non-seminoma. A non-seminoma grows more quickly and is more likely to spread than a seminoma, but both types need immediate treatment.

■ What is the function of the testicles?

The testicles, also called the testes, are part of a man's reproductive system. Each man has 2 testicles. They are located under the penis in a sac-like pouch called the scrotum. The testicles make sperm and testosterone. Testosterone is a hormone that plays a role in the development of a man's reproductive organs and other characteristics.

■ What does stage mean?

The stage is a way of describing where the cancer is located, if or where it has spread, and whether it is affecting other parts of the body. There are 4 stages for testicular cancer: stages I through III (1 through 3) plus stage 0 (zero). Stage 0 is called carcinoma in situ, a precancerous condition. Find more information about these stages at www.cancer.net/testicular.

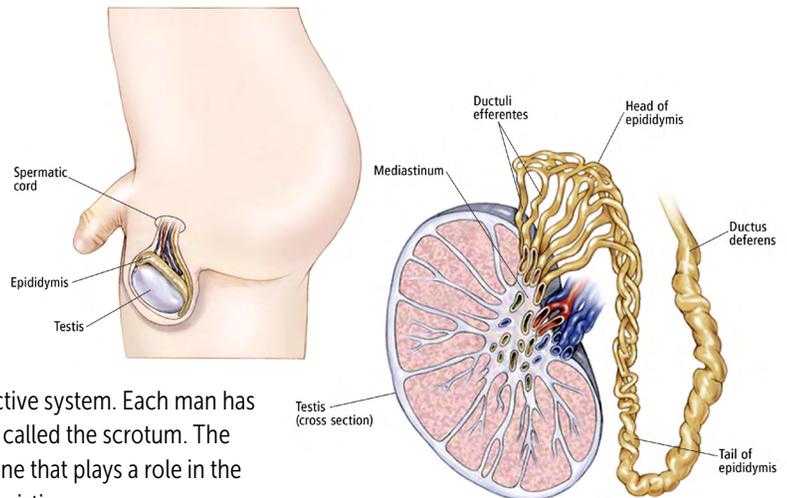
■ How is testicular cancer treated?

The treatment of testicular cancer depends on the type of tumor (seminoma or non-seminoma), the stage, the amount of certain substances called serum tumor markers in the blood, and the person's overall health. Testicular cancer is almost always curable if found early and is often curable even at later stages. The 3 main treatment options are surgery, chemotherapy, and radiation therapy. Treatment usually starts with surgery to remove the testicle with cancer, regardless of the stage of the cancer. If there is no evidence that the cancer has spread beyond the testicle, called stage I, your doctor may recommend surveillance to closely watch if the disease comes back. In some cases, even if the cancer has not spread, chemotherapy, radiation therapy, or additional surgery may be recommended to lower the risk of the cancer returning. Surgery in this case involves removing lymph nodes from the back of the abdomen.

If the cancer has spread to lymph nodes or other organs in the body, then the cancer is at a higher stage, called stage II or stage III disease. For higher-stage disease, treatment usually starts with removal of the testicle followed by chemotherapy. Radiation therapy may be used instead of chemotherapy to treat seminomas in specific situations. If there are any remaining tumors after chemotherapy, surgery may be used to remove them, especially if the cancer is a non-seminoma. When making treatment decisions, patients may also consider a clinical trial. Clinical trials are an option to consider for treatment and care for all stages of cancer. Talk with your doctor about all treatment options and any concerns about how your treatment may affect your sexual health and fertility before treatment begins. The side effects of testicular cancer treatment can often be prevented or managed with the help of your health care team. This is called palliative care or supportive care and is an important part of the overall treatment plan.

■ How can I cope with testicular cancer?

Absorbing the news of a cancer diagnosis and communicating with your health care team are key parts of the coping process. Seeking support, organizing your health information, making sure all of your questions are answered, and participating in the decision-making process are other steps. Talk with your health care team about any concerns. Understanding your emotions and those of people close to you can be helpful in managing the diagnosis, treatment, and healing process.



Questions to ask the health care team

Regular communication is important in making informed decisions about your health care. It can be helpful to bring someone along to your appointments to take notes. Consider asking your health care team the following questions:

- ▶ What type of testicular cancer do I have?
- ▶ Can you explain my pathology report (laboratory test results) to me?
- ▶ What stage is the testicular cancer? What does this mean?
- ▶ Would you explain my treatment options?
- ▶ What clinical trials are available for me? Where are they located, and how do I find out more about them?
- ▶ What treatment plan do you recommend? Why?
- ▶ What is the goal of each treatment? Is it to cure or treat the cancer, help me feel better, or both?
- ▶ Who will be part of my treatment team, and what does each member do?
- ▶ How will this treatment affect my daily life? Will I be able to work, exercise, and perform my usual activities?
- ▶ Could this treatment affect my sex life? If so, how and for how long?
- ▶ Will this treatment affect my ability to have children? Should I talk with a fertility specialist about sperm banking before treatment begins?
- ▶ What long-term side effects may be associated with my cancer treatment?
- ▶ If I'm worried about managing the costs of cancer care, who can help me?
- ▶ Where can I find emotional support for me and my family?
- ▶ If I have a question or problem, who should I call?

Find more questions to ask the health care team at www.cancer.net/testicular. For a digital list of questions, download Cancer.Net's free mobile app at www.cancer.net/app.

Words to know

Benign: A tumor that is not cancerous.

Biopsy: Removal of a tissue sample that is then examined under a microscope to check for cancer cells.

Chemotherapy: The use of drugs to destroy cancer cells.

Lymph node: A tiny, bean-shaped organ that fights infection.

Malignant: A tumor that is cancerous.

Metastasis: The spread of cancer from where it began to another part of the body.

Oncologist: A doctor who specializes in treating cancer.

Prognosis: Chance of recovery.

Radiation therapy: The use of high-energy x-rays to destroy cancer cells.

Radical inguinal orchiectomy: Removal of a testicle through an incision in the groin.

Retroperitoneal lymph node dissection: Surgery to remove the lymph nodes from the back of the abdomen.

Tumor: An abnormal growth of body tissue.

Urologist: A doctor who specializes in treating conditions of the urinary tract.

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