

Testicular Self-examination

Although rare, cancer of the testis (testicle) is the most common cause of cancer in young men in the U.K. The exact cause is unknown, but it seems to be getting more common. However, if caught early it is one of the easiest cancers to treat and cure. As this cancer is most common in men between the ages of 20-40, regular self-checking of the testes is recommended in this age group. This is especially true of brothers of people with testicular cancer as they have a higher than normal chance of developing this form of cancer.

Normal testes

It is best if young men become familiar with how their testes normally feel as any changes would then be easier to detect. The best time to examine them is after a bath or shower when relaxed. A good examination every couple of weeks or so is a sensible routine.

It is normal for one testis to be slightly bigger than the other and one to hang slightly lower than the other. Everyone is slightly different. The testes themselves feel like smooth, soft balls inside the baggy scrotum. At the top and to the back of the testis is attached the epididymis. This feels like an attached soft swelling (this stores the sperm). This is sometimes quite tender if pressed. Leading from this is the spermatic cord feeling like a soft, narrow tube, which passes up and into the groin (this carries the sperm). Sometimes people confuse the normal epididymis or spermatic cord with an abnormal lump.

What to look for

- Any change in size or weight of a testis.
- Any abnormal lumps, swellings or tender spots.

Possible abnormalities

Most abnormalities of the testes are not cancer. For example, fluid collections, infections and harmless cysts are common and treatable. Cancer of the testis normally starts as a small, abnormal, hard lump on the testes, felt away from the normal soft lump of the epididymis.

What if I find a lump?

Report it to your doctor. Doctors are used to examining testes and will be able to advise if the

abnormality is serious or not.

What if it is cancer?

Treatment of testicular cancer is commonly effective. In more than 90% of people there is a complete cure. However, the earlier it is detected the easier it is to treat. 50% of patients consult their doctor after the cancer has spread which makes treatment more difficult. Often this is because of unfounded fears or just hoping it will go away.