

## What is testicular cancer?

Testicular cancer occurs when abnormal cells within the testicles grow in an uncontrolled way.

The testicles are part of the male reproductive system. They are located behind the penis in a sac of skin called the scrotum.<sup>1</sup>

## What are the different types of testicular cancer?

There are five main types of testicular cancer. These are named after the cell type in which the cancer first develops.

- ▶ seminomas<sup>2</sup>
- ▶ choriocarcinoma
- ▶ embryonal carcinoma
- ▶ teratoma
- ▶ yolk sac tumour.<sup>2</sup>

Choriocarcinoma, embryonal carcinoma, teratoma and yolk sac tumour are known as non-seminoma cancers.

Testicular cancer can include a mix of both seminoma and non-seminoma cancer cells.<sup>2</sup>

## What are the symptoms of testicular cancer?

The most common symptoms of testicular cancer are:

- ▶ a painless lump or swelling in either testicle<sup>1</sup>
- ▶ a sudden build-up of fluid in the scrotum<sup>1</sup>
- ▶ a change in how the testicle feels<sup>1</sup>
- ▶ pain or discomfort in a testicle or in the scrotum.<sup>1</sup>
- ▶ an ache in the lower abdomen or groin<sup>1</sup>

There are a number of conditions that may cause these symptoms, not just testicular cancer. If any of these symptoms are experienced, it is important that they are discussed with a doctor.

## What are the risk factors for testicular cancer?

A risk factor is any factor that is associated with an increased chance of developing a particular health condition, such as testicular cancer. There are different types of risk factors, some of which can be modified and some which cannot.

It should be noted that having one or more risk factors does not mean a person will develop testicular cancer. Many people have at least one risk factor but will never develop testicular cancer, while others with testicular cancer may have had no known risk factors. Even if a person with testicular cancer has a risk factor, it is usually hard to know how much that risk factor contributed to the development of their disease.

While the causes of testicular cancer are not fully understood, there are a number of factors associated with the risk of developing the disease. These factors include:

- ▶ certain childhood conditions such as an undescended testicle or infantile hernia<sup>1,3</sup>
- ▶ a family history of testicular cancer<sup>1</sup>
- ▶ a personal history of testicular cancer<sup>1</sup>

## How is testicular cancer diagnosed?

A number of tests may be performed to investigate symptoms of testicular cancer and confirm a diagnosis. Some of the more common tests include:

- ▶ a physical examination<sup>1</sup>
- ▶ examination of a blood sample
- ▶ imaging of the testicle and surrounding organs, which may include ultrasound, computed tomography (CT) scan or magnetic resonance imaging (MRI)
- ▶ taking a sample of tissue (biopsy) from the testicle for examination under a microscope.

## Treatment options

Treatment and care of people with cancer is usually provided by a team of health professionals – called a multidisciplinary team.

Treatment for testicular cancer depends on the stage of the disease, the severity of symptoms and the person's general health. Treatment options can include surgery to remove the testicle(s), radiotherapy and/or chemotherapy to destroy cancer cells.<sup>1,2</sup>

Research is ongoing to find new ways to diagnose and treat different types of cancer. Some people may be offered the option of participation in a clinical trial to test new ways of treating testicular cancer.

## Finding support

People often feel overwhelmed, scared, anxious and upset after a diagnosis of cancer. These are all normal feelings.

Having practical and emotional support during and after diagnosis and treatment for cancer is very important. Support may be available from family and friends, health professionals or special support services.

In addition, State and Territory Cancer Councils provide general information about cancer as well as information on local resources and relevant support groups. The Cancer Council Helpline can be accessed from anywhere in Australia by calling **13 11 20** for the cost of a local call.

More information about finding support can be found on the Cancer Australia website **[www.canceraustralia.gov.au](http://www.canceraustralia.gov.au)**

## References

1. National Cancer Institute. Testicular cancer treatment (PDQ) – patient version. Available from <http://www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/pdq/treatment/testicular/Patient>. [Accessed July 2012].
2. National Cancer Institute. Testicular cancer treatment (PDQ) – health professional version. Available from <http://www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/pdq/treatment/testicular/HealthProfessional>. [Accessed July 2012].
3. Wijesinha S. Male reproductive health – what is the GP's role? *Australian Family Physician* 2004; 32(6): 408–411.