

Most testicular cancers can be found at an early stage. In some men, early testicular cancers cause symptoms that lead them to seek medical attention. Most of the time a lump on the testicle is the first sign. Unfortunately, however, some testicular cancers may not cause symptoms until after they have reached an advanced stage.

Most doctors agree that examining a man's testicles should be part of a general physical exam. The American Cancer Society (ACS) recommends a testicular exam as part of a routine cancer-related checkup.

The ACS advises men to be aware of testicular cancer and to see a doctor right away if they find a lump in a testicle. Because regular testicular self-exams have not been studied enough to show they reduce the death rate from this cancer, the ACS does not have a recommendation on regular testicular self-exams for all men. However, some doctors recommend that all men do monthly testicular self-exams after puberty.

Each man has to decide for himself whether or not to examine his testicles monthly, so instructions for testicular exams are included in this section. If you have certain risk factors that increase your chance of developing testicular cancer (such as an undescended testicle, previous germ cell tumor in one testicle, or a family history), you should seriously consider monthly self-exams and talk about it with your doctor.

## **Testicular self-exam**

The best time for you to examine your testicles is during or after a bath or shower, when the skin of the scrotum is relaxed.

- Hold the penis out of the way and examine each testicle separately.
- Hold the testicle between your thumbs and fingers with both hands and roll it gently between the fingers.
- Look and feel for any hard lumps or nodules (smooth rounded masses) or any change in the size, shape, or consistency of the testes.

You should be aware that each normal testis has an epididymis, which can feel like a small bump on the upper or middle outer side of the testis. Normal testicles also contain blood vessels, supporting tissues, and tubes that conduct sperm. Some men may confuse these with cancer at first. If you have any concerns, ask your doctor.

A testicle can get larger for many reasons other than cancer. Fluid can collect around the testicle to form a benign condition called a hydrocele. Other times, the veins in the testicle can dilate and cause enlargement and lumpiness around the testicle. This is called a varicocele. To be sure you have one of these conditions and not a tumor; you need to have a doctor examine you. The doctor may order an ultrasound exam (see the section "How is testicular cancer diagnosed?"). This is an easy and painless way of finding a tumor.

If you choose to examine your testicles, you will become familiar with what is normal and what is different. Always report any changes to your doctor without delay.

