

Testicular self examination

Around 145 Victorian men are diagnosed with testicular cancer every year. This rare cancer has a high cure rate if treated in its earlier stages. So it's important for men to recognise changes in their testicles.

It is important to perform a testicular self-examination even if you have had testicular cancer or are currently being treated. This is because cancer may develop in the other testis.

Who is at risk?

All men should check their testicles regularly, around every four weeks.

However men who have a history of undescended testicles at birth or men who are infertile are at greater risk of testicular cancer. These men should be vigilant and regularly examine their testicles for unusual lumps or swellings.

It's easy to check your testicles

Testicular self-examination (TSE) only takes a few minutes. It should be done when the scrotum is warm and relaxed – for example, after showering or bathing. You should aim to perform TSE about once every four weeks or so. Choose a day that's easy to remember, like the first day of every calendar month.

If you have been treated for testicular cancer, you should still make sure to examine your testicles because you have a one in 20 chance of developing cancer in the other testicle. See your doctor for further information or instruction on TSE, and for prompt diagnosis of any testicular lumps or swellings.

Testicle anatomy

The anatomy of the testicle includes:

- **Testicle** – small, oval-shaped sex gland that produces sex hormones and sperm. Another term for testicle is testis.
- **Epididymis** – a series of small tubes attached to the back of the testicle that collect and store sperm. The epididymis connects to a larger tube called the vas deferens.
- **Scrotum** – the skin sack that houses the testicles. Sperm production needs a temperature around 4°C lower than the body, which is why the testicles are located outside the body in the scrotum.

Characteristics of healthy testicles

Become familiar with the look, feel and shape of your testicles; this will help you notice any abnormalities.

The characteristics of healthy testicles include:

- Each testicle feels like a smooth, firm egg.
- One testicle tends to hang lower than the other.
- One testicle may be slightly larger than the other.
- There is no pain or discomfort when the testicles and scrotum are handled gently.

How to perform TSE

See your doctor for instruction on how to perform TSE. Generally, the procedure includes:

- Make sure your scrotum is warm and relaxed. You may like to perform TSE after showering or bathing.
- It may help to do TSE in front of the mirror so you can see as well as feel what you're doing.
- Check one testicle first, then the other.
- Gently roll one testicle using the fingers and thumbs of both hands.
- Feel along the underside of the scrotum to find the epididymis that sits at the back of the testicle. It should feel like a little bunch of tightly curled tubes.
- Perform TSE on the other testicle.
- TSE shouldn't be painful or uncomfortable. If you're experiencing any discomfort, stop pressing so hard.

What changes to look for

Symptoms of testicular cancer include a painless testicular lump, a sensation of heaviness in the scrotum, and a persistent ache in the lower abdomen or affected testicle. You should take notice of anything unusual, such as:

- A lump or swelling in or on the testicle itself
- Change in testicular size
- Change in testicular shape
- Change in the consistency or feel of the testicle.

Testicular conditions other than cancer

It's important to remember that testicular cancer is relatively uncommon, so don't panic if you find a lump or anything else that seems unusual. See your doctor for prompt diagnosis.

Some non-cancerous conditions that may affect the testicles include:

- **Cyst** – an abnormal yet harmless collection of fluid.
- **Varicocele** – varicose veins. About eight per cent of men have varicose veins of the scrotum.
- **Haematocele** – a blood clot caused by trauma or injury to the testicles or scrotum.
- **Epididymo-orchitis** – infection of the epididymis, testicle or both that causes inflammation and pain. Treatment includes antibiotics.
- **Testicular torsion** – the cord that attaches the testicle to the body twists and cuts off the blood supply. This extremely painful condition needs urgent medical attention.
- **Undescended testicles** – either one or both testicles are missing from the scrotum and are lodged instead inside the lower abdomen. Premature and low weight newborn boys are most prone to undescended testicles. This condition is known to increase the chance of testicular cancer later in life.

Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Andrology Australia Tel. 1300 303 878

Things to remember

- Testicular self-examination (TSE) only takes a few minutes and can help detect abnormalities.
- Being familiar with the look, feel and shape of your testicles will help you notice any changes early.
- See your doctor for prompt diagnosis of any testicular lumps or swellings.

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Andrology Australia

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