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MEN'S HEALTH: TESTICULAR CANCER

Over 8,000 new cases of testicular cancer are diagnosed every year, primarily affecting men between the ages of 20 and 39.

Risk Factors

Risk factors for testicular cancer include the following:

- Age – Younger men are more likely to develop the disease.
- Race – Testicular cancer is most common among white males.
- An undescended testicle, even after corrective surgery.
- Congenital abnormalities – Men born with irregularities of the testicles, penis or kidneys, as well as those with hernia in the groin, may be at an increased risk.
- Prior history of cancer in one testicle – the opposite testicle is then at a higher risk.
- A family history of testicular cancer.

Diagnosis

Several methods can be used to diagnose and identify the progression of testicular cancer:

- A physical exam – A thorough examination can rule out disorders other than cancer.
- Blood tests – Certain types of testicular cancer raise the level of specific substances in the blood. Blood tests that measure the levels of those substances are used to diagnose testicular cancer, and in some cases determine the extent of the disease.

- Ultrasound – Imaging techniques can help indicate possible tumors.
- Biopsy – The only positive way to identify if a tumor is cancerous is for a pathologist to examine a tissue sample under a microscope.

Prognosis and Treatment

Although the incidence of testicular cancer has risen in recent years, more than 95% of cases can be cured. Treatment for testicular cancer depends on the type of tumor and stage of the disease; the success rate is higher when it is found early. In addition, when the cancer is found early, treatment will often be less aggressive and produce fewer side effects. A combination of surgery, radiation therapy and chemotherapy has one of the highest cure rates.

Prevention

Most testicular cancers are first detected by the patient, either unintentionally or by self-examination. Routine testicular self-examination (TSE) increases a man's chance of finding a testicular tumor. Locating a tumor this way can boost the odds of early intervention and cure. Testicular tumors often feel like pea-sized, painless lumps or:

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- An enlarged testicle
- A feeling of heaviness, hardness or sudden collection of fluid in the scrotum
- A dull ache in the lower abdomen or groin
- Enlargement or tenderness of the breasts

If you find a lump or experience any of the above symptoms, call your doctor immediately.

For more information about how to do a proper self-exam, visit the Testicular Cancer Resource Center at <http://tcrc.acor.org/>.