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TESTES SELF-EXAMINATION (TSE)

BACKGROUND OF TESTES SELF-EXAMINATION

Testicular cancer is the most common type of cancer in men ages 20 to 35. Yet, because it accounts for only about 1 percent of all cancers in men, many people have never heard of this type of cancer.

Testicular cancer is of special concern to young men. It can occur anytime after age 15. It is less common in middle-aged and older men. White men are four times more likely to develop testicular cancer than black men. The rate among Hispanic men lies between those of blacks and whites.

Two groups of men have a greater risk of developing testicular cancer--those whose testicles have not descended into the scrotum and those whose testicles descended after age 6. Testicular cancer is 3 to 17 times more likely to develop in these men.

WHAT DO THE TESTICLES DO?

Testicles are male reproductive organs. They produce and store sperm. They also produce testosterone, a hormone that causes such male traits as facial hair and lower voice pitch. Testicles are smooth, oval-shaped, and somewhat firm to the touch. They are below the penis in a sac of skin called the scrotum.

The testicles normally descend into the scrotum before birth. Parents should have their infant sons examined by a doctor to be sure that the testicles have properly descended. If they have not, this can be easily corrected with surgery.

Fifteen years ago, testicular cancer was often fatal because it spread quickly to vital organs such as the lungs. Today, due to advances in treatment, testicular cancer is one of the most curable cancers, especially if detected and treated promptly.

SYMPTOMS OF TESTES CANCER

The most common symptom of testicular cancer is a small, painless lump in a testicle or a slightly enlarged testicle. It is important for men to become familiar with the size and feeling of their normal testicles, so that they can detect changes if they occur.

Other possible symptoms include a feeling of heaviness in the scrotum, a dull ache in the lower stomach or groin, a change in the way a testicle feels, or a sudden accumulation of blood or fluid in the scrotum. These symptoms can also be caused by infections or other conditions that are not cancer. A doctor can tell you if you have cancer and what the proper treatment should be.

HOW TO DO TSE (Testicular Self-Examination)

A simple procedure called testicular self-exam (TSE) can increase the chances of finding a tumor early.

Men should perform TSE once a month--after a warm bath or shower. The heat causes the scrotal skin

to relax, making it easier to find anything unusual. TSE is simple and only takes a few minutes:

Examine each testicle gently with both hands. The index and middle fingers should be placed underneath the testicle while the thumbs are placed on the top. Roll the testicle gently between the thumbs and fingers. One testicle may be larger than the other. This is normal.

The epididymis is a cord-like structure on the top and back of the testicle that stores and transports the sperm. Do not confuse the epididymis with an abnormal lump.

Feel for any abnormal lumps--about the size of a pea on the front or the side of the testicle. These lumps are usually painless.

If you do **find** a lump, you should contact your doctor right away. The lump may be due to an infection, and a doctor can decide the proper treatment. If the lump is not an infection, it may be a testes cancer. Remember that testicular cancer is highly curable, especially when detected and treated early. Testicular cancer almost always occurs in only one testicle, and the other testicle is all that is needed for full sexual function.

Routine testicular self-exams are important, but they cannot substitute for a doctor's examination. Your doctor should examine your testicles when you have a physical exam. You also can ask your doctor to check the way you do TSE.

This information is provided from the National Institutes of Health, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. For more information call us or the Cancer Information Service at 1-800-4-CANCER.