

Testicular Self-Examination

What is a testicular self-exam?

A testicular self-exam is a cancer-screening test that men can do themselves. The purpose of the exam is to look for any unusual lumps, swellings, tenderness, or excess fluid in or around the testicles. These are possible signs of cancer. Testicular cancer grows quickly. Treatment can be more effective when the cancer is found early.

The testicles are part of the male reproductive organs. They are found in a sac of loose skin, called the scrotum or scrotal sac, which lies directly below the base of the penis.

Who should do a testicular self-exam?

Regular self-exams are recommended for men who have a higher risk for testicular cancer. The risk factors are:

- a testicle that did not move down into the scrotum before birth (undescended testicle)
- a history of cancer in one of the testicles
- a family history of testicular cancer
- abnormal development of the testicles, penis, or kidneys.

It has not yet been shown that regular testicular self-exams lower the death rate of testicular cancer. But some healthcare providers recommend doing a self-exam once a month, starting when you are in your teens. This is because even though testicular cancer is uncommon, it occurs most often in young men and can spread quickly.

There are other reasons to check the testicles. Becoming comfortable with checking the genital area can help with personal hygiene. It can help you find signs of sexually transmitted infection, such as genital warts and herpes, which you might not notice otherwise.

How do I do a testicular exam?

To perform the exam:

- Stand in front of a mirror and look for any signs of swelling.
- Support each testicle with one hand and feel it with your other hand.
- Roll each testicle between the thumb and fingers, feeling for any unusual lumps. Lumps may be as small as a grain of rice and are usually quite firm, like hard rubber. (It is normal to feel a soft cordlike structure on the top and back of each testicle. This is the epididymis, which is the tube through which sperm pass during an orgasm.)
- Check for areas that feel tender.

When should I call my healthcare provider?

It is normal for one testicle to be slightly larger than the other. If you find a hard mass in either testicle, you should see your healthcare provider right away. Growths that you notice may not be cancer, but you need to report any changes to your provider promptly. Remember that testicular cancer is highly curable when caught early.

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1. Stand in front of a mirror and look for any signs of swelling.
2. Support your testicles with one hand and feel each one with your other hand.
3. Roll the testicles between the thumb and fingers, feeling for any lumps. It is normal to feel a soft cordlike structure on the top and back of each testicle. Lumps that need to be checked by your healthcare provider may be as small as a grain of rice and are usually quite firm like hard rubber. Also check for areas that feel tender.

