

# Testicular cancer

What you should know



Marie Keating

FOUNDATION

making cancer less frightening by enlightening

# testicular cancer

## the facts

- Testicular cancer is a relatively rare disease
- However, it is the most common cancer found in young men aged between 15 and 34 years
- Every year about 170 men are diagnosed with testicular cancer in Ireland
- This number has been growing over the past few years so it is important to check your testicles on a regular basis
- Testicular cancer is very treatable - more than 95% of men with testicular cancer are cured

### The testicles and testicular cancer

The testicles are the male reproductive organs contained within a bag of skin called the scrotum, which hangs below the penis. The testicles produce sperm. Testicular cancer is a growth or tumour, which appears in one of the testicles (which are commonly known as 'balls').

### Risks and causes of testicular cancer

- Being a man
- Being born with un-descended or partly descended testicles
- Having a family member, father or brother who has developed the disease
- Being a male with a fertility problem

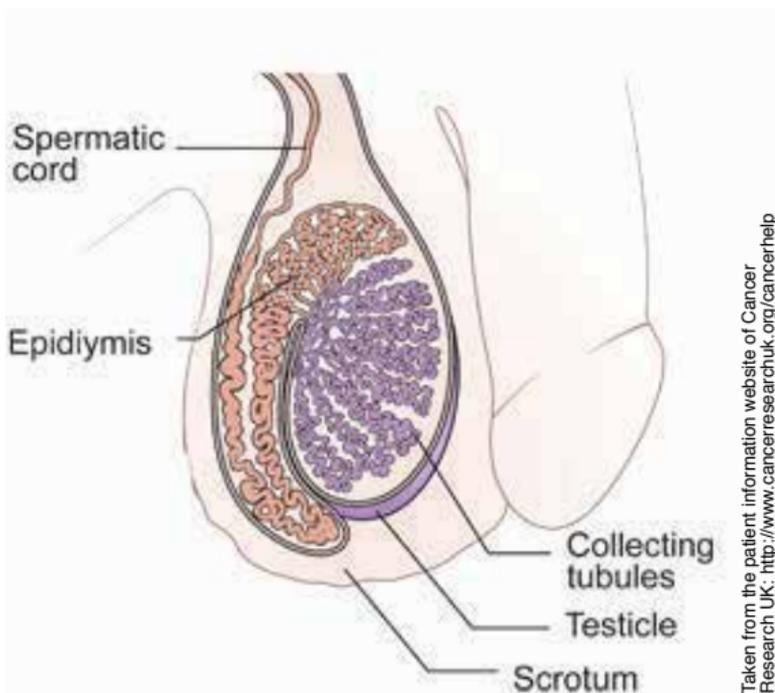
For information on risks and symptoms of common male cancers see [www.mariekeating.ie/get-men-talking](http://www.mariekeating.ie/get-men-talking)

## What to look out for

Cancers which are found early are the most easily treated. It makes sense to know how your body normally looks and feels and this includes your testicles. This will make it easier for you to notice any changes. A swelling or lump in one of your testicles which is not usually painful is the most common sign of testicular cancer, however there are other signs to look out for:

- Small lumps or hardness on the front or side of a testis
- Swelling or enlargement of the testis
- An increase in firmness of the testicle
- A sensation of dragging or heaviness in the scrotum
- A dull ache in the lower abdomen or groin

**It is important to note that most lumps are benign (harmless) but others may be cancerous and should be treated as quickly as possible. It is unusual to develop cancer in both testicles at the same time, so if you are wondering whether a testis is normal or not, you can compare it with the other.**



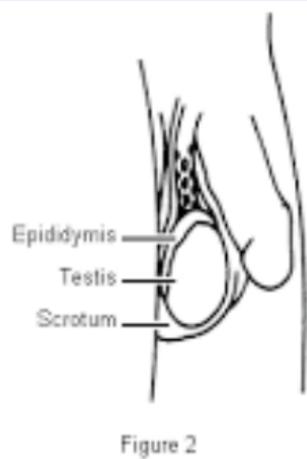
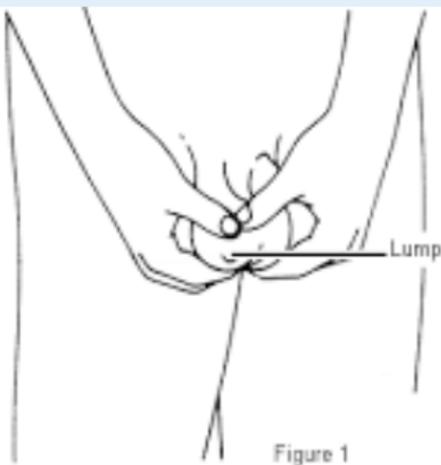
## How to check yourself

Often the best place to check yourself is in the bath or shower where the scrotum is relaxed and the testicles can be felt easily.

- Hold your scrotum in both hands
- Use your fingers and a thumb to examine your testicles.
- It is common for one testicle to be slightly larger than the other, so don't be alarmed if this is the case. Gently feel each testicle, one at a time.
- You should be able to feel a soft tube at the top and back of both of them. This tube (epididymis) carries the sperm. It may be slightly tender but do not confuse this with an abnormal lump in the testicles.

**If you notice any of the signs listed to the left, go to your GP immediately and they will be able to assess you and, if necessary, refer you to a consultant for further investigations. Do not be embarrassed or nervous. Remember early detection of the disease is your best chance of a cure.**

**Diagram showing how to check testicles:**



## How testicular cancer is diagnosed

Usually, you begin by seeing your GP who examines you and takes your medical details. Then, if they think it's necessary, your GP refers you to a consultant for tests to see whether you have testicular cancer.

At the hospital, the doctor will examine you and ask questions about your health and your family's health. They will test your blood as testicular cancers often produce hormones that can be measured in the blood. You may also have an ultrasound scan of both testicles and your scrotum. An ultrasound is a painless examination using sound waves. This can show if there is a solid lump, or a fluid filled cyst which is less likely to be a cancer.

## How testicular cancer can affect sex life and fertility

Removing one testicle does not affect sex drive or the ability to have an erection provided the remaining testicle is normal. The loss of a testicle may embarrass a young man. For this reason a testicular prosthesis (false testicle) can be placed in the scrotum at the time of surgery to remove the cancerous one.

Fertility can be compromised by testicular cancer treatment. However the potential to father children should not be greatly affected provided the other is normal. Chemotherapy, however, does affect sperm production in the testicle. Because of this, it is now recommended that patients with testicular cancer arrange to freeze sperm so that if there are problems with fertility later on, this frozen sperm can be used to fertilize a partner's egg and father a child.

## What is the treatment for Testicular Cancer

- If the blood tests or ultrasound results show that you more than likely have cancer then the abnormal testicle is removed by surgery with a small incision in the groin.
- You are then scanned to see if the cancer has spread. Depending on the scans and the results of tests on the abnormal testicle, you may then be advised to have one or both of the below:
  - Radiotherapy: the use of radiation to kill cancer cells
  - Chemotherapy: the use of drugs to kill cancer cells

The results of modern treatment for testicular cancer are excellent even in those where the cancer has spread outside the testicle to other parts of the body.

**For further information, visit**  
**[www.mariekeating.ie/get-men-talking](http://www.mariekeating.ie/get-men-talking)**

## About the Marie Keating Foundation

Following their mother Marie's death in 1998, the Keating family promised that they would do everything they could to bring an end to cancer. The Marie Keating Foundation helps men and women prevent cancer, detect it at its earliest stages and journey through cancer diagnosis, treatment and survivorship.

Through its community information service, the Foundation's nurses have advised over 230,000 people on the causes and risk factors of cancer. The Foundation offers national awareness and education programmes covering the most common cancers affecting people in Ireland, including bowel, breast, lung, prostate and skin cancer.

Through its Comfort Fund, the Marie Keating Foundation provides financial assistance to people who are receiving treatment for any kind of cancer and who find themselves in financial difficulty as a result. In 2016 alone, over 525 families received assistance from the Comfort Fund.

The Marie Keating Foundation supports cancer survivors through its Survive & Thrive programmes which are run nationwide, free of charge, for men and women who have finished their cancer treatment. Over 600 cancer survivors have attended courses and seminars since 2015.

*On 2 February 1998, our mother Marie died from cancer. We started this Foundation with the aim of making cancer less frightening by enlightening. We also hope that other families will not have to go through what we did and to ensure that such a wonderful person did not die in vain.*

**Take care,**



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