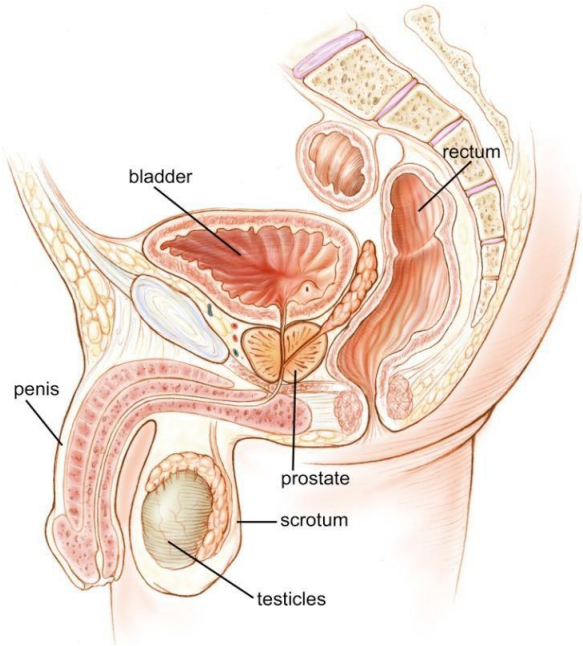
Testicular Cancer

The testicles, also called the testes, are a part of the male reproductive system. The testicles, which are slightly smaller than a golf ball, are contained in a sac of skin called the scrotum, which hangs beneath the penis.

The testicles produce male hormones, one of which is testosterone. These hormones control the development of the reproductive organs and male characteristics. The testicles also produce and store sperm, the male reproductive cells.



The testicles and surrounding organs.

About Cancer
Cancer is a group of many different diseases that have some important things in common. Cancer affects cells, the body's basic unit of life. Normally, cells grow and divide only when the body needs more. This orderly process helps keep the body healthy.

Sometimes, cells keep dividing when not needed. These cells form a mass of extra tissue, called a growth or tumor. Tumors can be benign or malignant.

Benign tumors are not cancerous. They often can be removed and, in most cases, they do not come back. Most importantly, benign tumors are rarely a threat to life.

Malignant tumors are cancerous. Malignant tumor cells are abnormal and divide without control or order. These cancer cells can invade and destroy the tissues around them. Cancer cells can break away from a malignant tumor and enter the bloodstream or the lymphatic system. This process is the way cancer spreads from the original (primary) tumor to other parts of the body.

Testicular Cancer
Testicular cancer is a disease in which malignant cells form in the tissue of one or both testicles.

The testicles contain several types of cells, each of which may develop into the same or different type of cancer. It is important to distinguish what types of cancers develop because each differs in its prognosis and treatment. If detected early, testicular cancer is a highly treatable and usually curable. Testicular cancer is the most common cancer in men 20 to 35 years old.

Sperm Banking
Before cancer treatment starts, men who may want to have children in the future should consider banking sperm. Banking sperm involves freezing a semen sample. The sample can later be thawed and used to make a woman pregnant.

Most health insurance plans do not pay for sperm banking. Some sperm banks have payment plans for patients with cancer. There are also financial assistance programs that can lower the cost of banking and storage.

How Do I Bank Sperm Before Starting Cancer Treatment?
Collecting semen is not painful. The sample is collected at an infertility clinic or sperm bank. To get the sample, a man must ejaculate through masturbation. The clinic will test the semen for sperm count and motility. The sample is divided into small amounts and frozen.

How Long Can Sperm Be Frozen?
Frozen samples may be stored a long time. Although freezing and thawing may kill some of the sperm cells, the actual time the sample is frozen does not cause damage. Healthy babies have been born with sperm stored over 20 years.

Treatment
Your doctor will recommend a treatment based on the type of testicular cancer you have, as well as on the stage of your disease. Some treatments are standard, which are those currently used, and some are being tested in clinical trials. Before starting treatment, patients may want to think about taking part in a clinical trial.

A clinical trial is a research study meant to help improve current treatments or obtain information on new treatments for patients with cancer. When clinical trials show that a new treatment is better than the standard, the newer method may become the standard.

Choosing the most appropriate treatment is a decision that ideally involves the patient, family and health care team.

Types of Standard Treatment
Surgery to remove the testicle and some of the lymph nodes is called a radical inguinal orchiectomy. If surgery to remove the testicle is your best treatment option, your doctor will discuss the procedure with you.

Chemotherapy is a cancer treatment that uses drugs to stop the growth of cancer cells, either by killing the cells or by stopping them from dividing.

In some cases, patients receive chemotherapy after surgery to kill any cancer cells that are left. Treatment given after surgery to increase the chances of a cure is called adjuvant therapy.

Radiation treatment uses high-energy X-rays or other types of radiation to kill cancer cells or keep them from growing. There are two types of radiation. External radiation therapy uses a machine outside the body to send radiation toward the cancer. Internal radiation therapy uses a radioactive substance sealed in needles, seeds, wires or catheters that are placed directly into or near the cancer. The way the radiation treatment is given depends on the type and stage of the cancer being treated.

New types of treatment are tested in clinical trials. Ask your doctor if a clinical trial is available for your type of cancer.