

# Undescended Testicles

## What Parents Should Know



### How Does the Male Reproductive System Form?

The penis, testicles and scrotum take shape in the mother's womb. Testicles form early in a baby's growth. They start in the lower belly (abdomen) and descend into the scrotum before a boy is born.

### What are Undescended Testicles?

Undescended testicles is the term used when one or both of the testicles don't descend into place. The scrotum looks and feels empty. Most of the time there are no other issues. The medical term is cryptorchidism.

Testicles that don't descend won't work the way they should. The scrotum keeps the testicles cool to keep sperm healthy. When testicles can't cool, this stops sperm from growing well. Unhealthy sperm leads to infertility (when a man can't make a baby).

Undescended testicles are also linked to a higher risk of:

- Testicular cancer in adulthood
- Testicular torsion (twisting of the blood vessels that bring blood to and from the testis)
- Inguinal hernia (a hernia that develops near the groin)

In about half of the boys born this way, the testicle will descend into place on its own. This often happens within the first 3-6 months of life. If they don't descend after 6 months, they should see a pediatric urologist and treatment may be needed.

### What Causes Undescended Testicles?

It is not clear why the testicles fail to descend. It could be because the baby is born early and the testicles didn't fully develop. Or, the testicles descend but miss the scrotum. Sometimes the baby's hormones can't stimulate the testicles

the way they should. Some studies have found that genetics can play a role, passed down from a male relative.

### How is an Undescended Testicle Treated?

Surgery is required when testicles don't descend naturally. A pediatric urologist can talk with you about options. Drugs and hormone treatments have not been found to help. There are two main types of surgery for undescended testicles, they are:

- Orchiopexy - Usually, a very quick and successful type of surgery. It includes two small cuts. One cut to find the testicle, and another cut to put the testicle in place. Almost always, the child can go home the same day.
- Laparoscopic surgery - This surgery is done when your doctor cannot feel the testicles to look for them in the abdomen. A special, tiny camera and tools are used to work inside the child's body. With this, the testicle(s) are found and freed from nearby tissue. They are then moved into place and secured there.

If the testicle is too high in the abdomen, other treatment may be needed to fully bring the testicle(s) into the scrotum.

After treatment, most boys grow normally. They can become fertile as they mature into men. The testicle often grows to regular size in the scrotum.

When the child becomes a teen, he should have routine physical exams. He should also learn to do testicular self-exams every month. This type of care is used to look for signs of testicular cancer. Even though the risk is small for testicular cancer, it is still important to do monthly self-exams.



# Undescended Testicles

## What Parents Should Know

### Questions to Ask Your Doctor

- Should I wait to treat my baby?
- Are there any side effects from surgery?
- How long is recovery?
- What should be done after surgery to care for my baby?
- Will my baby have any problems in the future if he's treated now?
- Will my baby be fertile and able to have children of his own?
- Can we do anything to lower my baby's risk for testicular cancer in the future?

### About the Urology Care Foundation

The Urology Care Foundation is the world's leading urologic foundation – and the official foundation of the American Urological Association. We provide information for those actively managing their urologic health and those ready to make health changes. Our information is based on the American Urological Association resources and is reviewed by medical experts. To learn more, visit the Urology Care Foundation's website, **UrologyHealth.org/UrologicConditions** or go to **UrologyHealth.org/FindAUrologist** to find a doctor near you.

### Disclaimer

This information is not a tool for self-diagnosis or a substitute for professional medical advice. It is not to be used or relied on for that purpose. Please talk to your urologist or health care provider about your health concerns. Always talk to a health care provider before you start or stop any treatments, including medications. For more information, visit **UrologyHealth.org/Download** or call 800-828-7866.

