

A User's Guide

What every man needs to know

1. Why men need to know more

Good health is vital for a happy and full life. But, sadly, most men don't look after themselves very well. For example, women aged between 25 and 34 are twice as likely to visit a doctor than men of the same age*. Yet, men do not live as long and have more health risks than women, so it is crucial that men know more about looking after their health.

Male sexual health is also very important. The normal working of the male reproductive system plays a key role in many areas of well-being. Knowing more about your body, how it works, and what diseases can affect you is the first step to a healthier life.

*Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Australia's Health 2002

2. How it all works

The brain plays an important part in the control of the male reproductive system. The **hypothalamus** and **pituitary gland** both sit at the base of the brain and together, 'trigger' the testicles to make sperm and male sex hormones, (testosterone).

The **penis** has three functions: passing semen, passing urine and giving sexual pleasure.

The **testicles** (or **testes**) are two egg-shaped organs (glands) that hang behind the penis in a bag of skin called the scrotum. The testicles produce sperm (about 70 million every day, right into old age) and testosterone.

It takes about 70 days for each sperm to grow into a 'tadpole-like' sperm shape in the testicle. Sperm then move from the testicles into the **epididymis**, a coiled tube (nearly five metres long!) that is coiled up over the back of each testicle. Here the sperm continue to develop (mature) for about ten days.

Sperm pass from the epididymis into tubes called the **vas deferens**, one joined to each testicle. Sperm then pass through the vas deferens to the **ejaculatory ducts** in the **prostate gland**. The prostate sits below the bladder, is about the size of a walnut and makes an energy-rich fluid that mixes with the sperm. The prostate makes up about a quarter of the fluid volume of semen. The **seminal vesicles** also make an energy-rich fluid that makes about two thirds of the semen. The ejaculatory ducts join the **urethra**, a single tube that connects the bladder to the tip of the penis. The urethra carries both urine and semen out of the body.

Testosterone is the most important male sex hormone and is needed for good reproductive and sexual health. Hormones are chemical messengers that are made in one organ and then carried in the blood to act on different organs in the body. Testosterone produces the physical changes that happen as young boys go through puberty, such as the increase in size of the penis and testicles, and also hair on the face and body. Testosterone helps the testicles to make sperm but also is important for general health, including growth of the bones and muscles.

3. What can go wrong?

Like any other part of the human body, things can sometimes go wrong with the male reproductive system. When they do, it's important to see a doctor quickly. With most problems, getting help early on can avoid serious long-term problems.

Here are some of the most common problems that men may face:

Infertility

Often, men are shocked to be told that problems in having a baby are because of problems on their part. **But, in fact, about one in twenty men in Australia are infertile.**

Male infertility can have many causes, but problems with the number or quality of sperm being made are the most common cause. Coping with male infertility can be very difficult: men can become stressed, frustrated and feel that it is very unfair, often because in nearly half of cases, doctors can find no reason why sperm are not being made normally. But some problems can be treated by a doctor, and should be talked over with a doctor before going on with assisted reproductive technologies (IVF), adoption or foster parenting.

Prostate enlargement

Most common in older men, about **1 in 7 Australian men over 40 years of age will suffer from problems with their prostate.** The most common prostate disease is a non-cancerous growth (enlargement) of the prostate called Benign Prostatic Hyperplasia (BPH). While usually not life-threatening, BPH can make going to the toilet (urination) difficult and life uncomfortable.

Both surgery and drugs can be given by a doctor to make the symptoms of prostate disease better. However, not all urination problems are caused by the prostate, so it's important to see your doctor.

Prostate cancer

Prostate cancer is very common and about 10,000 men in Australia every year face being told they have prostate cancer. Prostate cancer often happens with no symptoms, so men should think about talking to a doctor about testing by Rectal Examination and Prostate Specific Antigen (PSA) test. There is much debate about the PSA test so when thinking about being tested for prostate cancer, talk it over with a doctor to make sure you understand if testing would be helpful for your situation. Prostate cancer can be treated with surgery, radiation therapy and 'watchful waiting'.

Erectile dysfunction

Sexual problems in men are more common than you might think. **About one in 5 Australian men over the age of 40 have problems getting or keeping an erection (erectile dysfunction or impotence).** In some cases, it's a sign of another serious disease such as diabetes or heart problems. Even if the cause of erectile problems is a physical one, getting some counselling or emotional support is an important part of treatment.

There are many treatments for erectile dysfunction -including drugs -but talking to your partner and your doctor is the most important first step.

Testosterone deficiency

Lower energy levels, mood swings, bad temper (irritability), poor concentration, a drop off in muscle strength or a lack of interest in sex may be a sign of low testosterone levels (**testosterone deficiency**). **One in 200 men in Australia suffer from low testosterone levels.**

Testosterone deficiency affects men of all ages and can be caused by a genetic or medical problem, by damage to the testicles, or simply be part of ageing. In some older men, testosterone levels fall to a point that treatment is needed. Testosterone deficiency can only be diagnosed by a doctor, who can give treatment in the form of injections, implants, capsules, patches or gels.

Testicular cancer

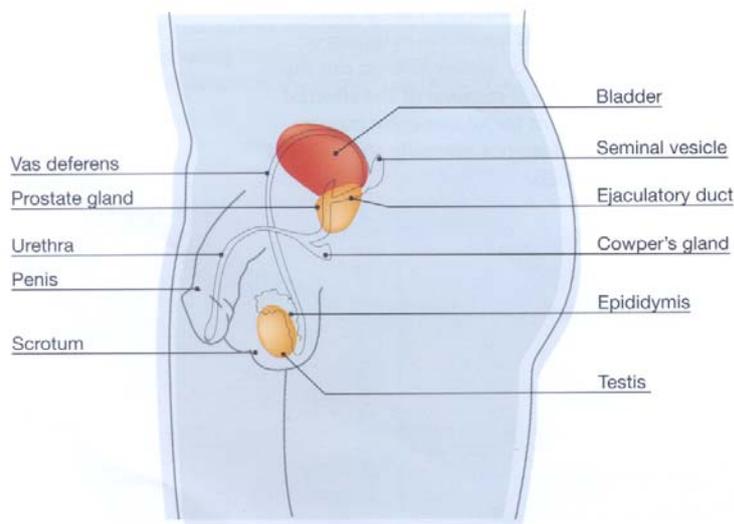
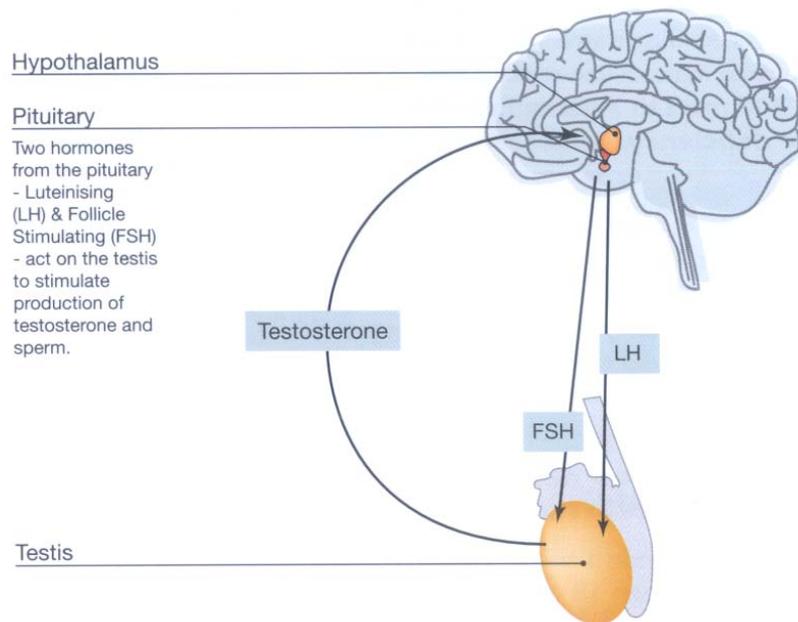
Testicular cancer is **the second most common cancer in men aged from 18 to 39.** But it is easy to treat and, when found early, nearly all men (over 95 per cent) are cured.

A hard, painless lump in the testicle is the most common sign, but the testicle may also feel painful and tender. In a few men, constant backache, coughing or breathlessness, and swollen or sore to the touch (tender) breasts can mean the cancer has spread to other parts of the body. Removing the cancerous testicle by surgery is the first treatment for all testicular cancer. This surgery does not usually change sexual performance or being able to get an erection.

4. How to find out more

The most important step is to see your doctor.

However, if you would like more information about any of these problems, visit the Andrology Australia website www.andrologyaustralia.org



Andrology is the study of the functions and diseases specific to males, especially of the reproductive organs. It is the same as gynaecology in women.

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