Undescended Testes in Boys Increases Risk of Testicular Cancer

Early surgery could reduce malignancy and infertility in adulthood.

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The likelihood of developing testicular cancer and infertility later in life is greater among boys with undescended testes (testicles that haven't dropped into their normal place in the scrotum), suggest new findings from a population-based cohort study published in The Lancet Child & Adolescent Health, reports the University of Sydney.

Undescended testes is the most common reproductive birth defect in infant boys, affecting 3 or 4 out of 100 newly born males, according to the Urology Care Foundation. While in half of these cases, the testicles drop on their own within three months, about 1 or 2 out of 100 boys with this condition will require surgery.

For the population-based cohort study, researchers in Australia assessed both adult fertility and cancer risk following surgical correction for undescended testes in early childhood among more than 350,000 boys born in Western Australia from 1970 to 1999.

Boys with undescended testes were 2.4 times more likely to be at risk for testicular cancer and their risk of testicular cancer increased by 6 percent with each six-month increase in age at time of surgery.

Research showed that young men with this condition were 20 percent less likely to father children in adulthood and were twice as likely to use assisted reproductive technology for infertility.

These findings support international guidelines that recommend surgery before 18 months of age for boys with undescended testes.

"Before this study, there was no evidence-based information on the impact of early surgery on the future risk of testicular cancer and infertility in adults males," said study leader Francisco Schneuer, PhD, of the University of Sydney. "Early surgery can reduce the risk of malignancy and male infertility and ultimately has the potential to reduce future adult male reproductive disorders."

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