

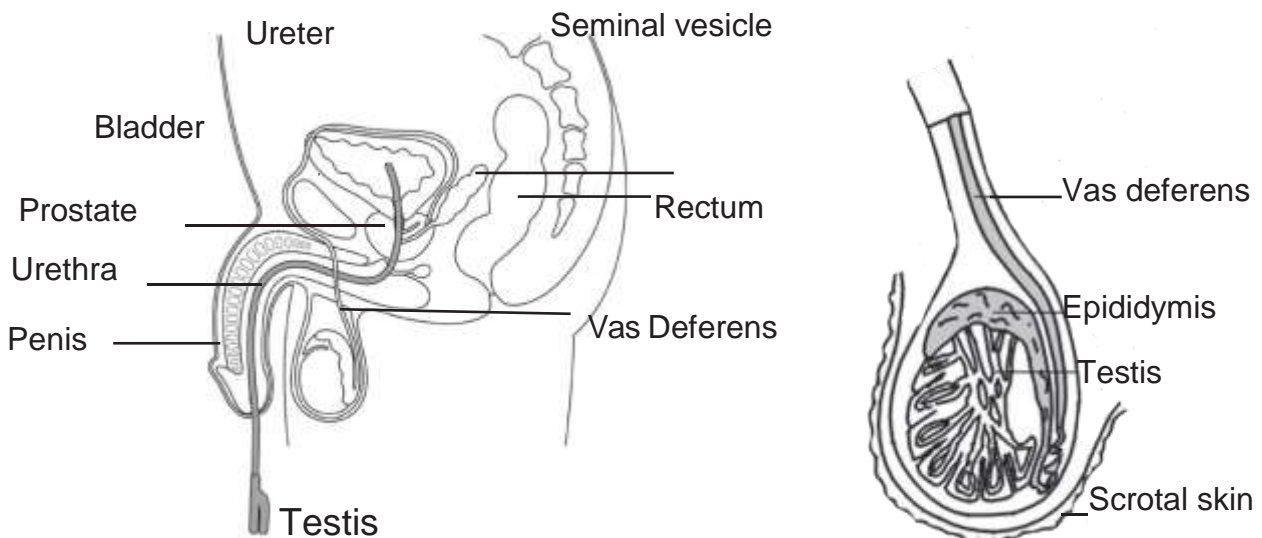
Patient information

Epididymal Cyst

Urology Speciality

An epididymal cyst is a swelling of the epididymis. The cysts develop for no apparent reason, are harmless, and can be left alone. A small operation can remove them if needed. However, an operation can lead to long-term scrotal pain or fertility problems.

The normal scrotum and testes



The testes hang down behind the penis inside the scrotum and make sperm. It is normal for one testis to be slightly bigger than the other, and for one to hang slightly lower than the other.

The testes themselves feel like smooth, soft balls inside the baggy scrotum. At the top and to the back of each testis is the epididymis (this stores the sperm). This feels like a soft swelling attached to the testis, and can be quite tender if you press it firmly.

Leading from the epididymis is the vas deferens. You can feel the vas deferens at the back and top of the scrotum. They feel like soft, narrow tubes passing up and into the groin. (The vas deferens carries the sperm to the penis.) Some people confuse the normal epididymis or vas deferens with an abnormal lump.

What is an epididymal cyst?

An epididymal cyst is a cystic swelling of the epididymis. They are benign (non- cancerous). They contain fluid. The fluid sometimes contains sperm, which is then called a spermatocoele.

They vary in size from tiny (less than one centimetre) to large (bigger than the testis itself). Although you may only feel one cyst (the largest one) it is very common to find several smaller cysts present that you cannot feel.

What do epididymal cysts look and feel like?

Small epididymal cysts may just make the epididymis feel bigger than normal. Larger cysts may be felt as smooth, spherical masses attached to the top of the testis. The testis can still be felt and feels normal. Larger epididymal cysts may feel like a third testis (the Pawn Broker sign).

Epididymal cysts are normally painless. Large epididymal cysts may cause discomfort because of their size. Walking or sexual activity may become uncomfortable if you have a very large epididymal cyst.

What causes epididymal cysts?

The cause of epididymal cysts is unknown. Epididymal cysts are more common the older you are. About one in four men will have epididymal cysts on ultrasound scanning; most of these will be too small to feel.

Do I need any tests?

A doctor will want to check that the testes are healthy. If the epididymal cyst is small and the doctor can feel the testis no further tests may be needed. Commonly an ultrasound scan of the testes will be advised. This can confirm that the swelling is an epididymal cyst and that the testis is normal.

What are the treatments for epididymal cysts?

- **Leave alone.** If the epididymal cyst causes no symptoms the best option is simply to leave it alone. If it becomes larger or troublesome, you can always change your mind. If left alone some cysts will disappear, some will stay the same and a few will get larger.
- **Drainage:** The fluid can be drained with a needle and syringe. However, it is common for the cyst to refill with fluid within a few months and risks causing infection and bleeding in the cyst. Drainage may be helpful in working out if the cyst is the cause of scrotal discomfort. If draining the cyst does not relieve the discomfort then it is unlikely to be causing it.
- **Surgery:** Epididymal cysts can be removed with a relatively simple surgical operation. However, there are risks associated with surgery. These include severe bruising or infection at the time or soon after surgery.
- In the longer term there may be scar formation causing blockage of the epididymis on that side leading to fertility problems. Another problem is with long term scrotal pain which may be life long and difficult to treat. Even if they are removed epididymal cysts may grow back again at some time in the future.

Note: Doctors (GP's and Consultants) do not mind seeing men with concerns over lumps in the scrotum. If you find a lump in the scrotum then see your GP at the earliest opportunity. They will decide whether you need to be seen by a specialist.

It is never a waste of their time or yours. For further information please see the leaflet entitled PIF 753 Testicular Self Examination

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Further information

For general queries about epididymal cysts telephone the Urology Centre on Tel: 0151 282 6797 or 0151 282 6877

Text phone number: 18001 0151 282 6797 / 18001 0151 282 6877

For clinical questions specific to your case, telephone the secretary of your Urology Consultant.

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