

△ GENERAL INFORMATION

A mass in the *scrotum* (the sac behind the penis) can be a number of things. Because such a mass can either be something not to worry about or something that can be very serious, it is wise to see a doctor if such a condition is present.

The *testicle* is the organ that is most easily felt in the sac. All the normal structures in the scrotum are not easily felt unless something is wrong with them.

COMMON SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- There may be no symptoms at all, except that a mass may be present on the testicle or the entire testicle may be enlarged.
- Sometimes the entire scrotum is swollen so that a normal testicle inside it cannot be felt.
- Often, the mass in the testicle hurts; even the entire testicle may hurt.
- The mass or swelling can be there for quite a while, or it can appear almost overnight and be very painful.
- Very rarely, the entire scrotum (both right and left sides) is swollen.

DIAGNOSIS

Different problems can produce different symptoms and different findings on examination. The most important things are the history and the physical examination of the scrotum. Sometimes it is impossible to determine what is inside the scrotum just by examining it with the hands; some other tests may be necessary, including the following:

- *Transillumination*: The examining room is darkened and a bright focused light is placed directly on the skin of the scrotum. If the swelling in the scrotum is just clear fluid, the light usually goes through the thin skin of the scrotum and comes out through the other side, allowing the outline of the mass to be seen. If the fluid is something dense like blood or there is a solid mass, the light will not come through at all.
- *Ultrasound*: Harmless sound waves are aimed at the area of your scrotum. The sound waves bouncing back (the echoes) from this area are seen as a picture on a screen. This is a painless and convenient way to examine organs and tissues inside the scrotum.

The following are some of the possible diagnoses (Fig. 1):

- *Hernia*: A portion of the intestine has come through an opening in the muscle (the hernia) and traveled down toward the scrotum, usually the upper part of it. Most of the time, this mass goes away when the person lies down. This can occur at any age.
- *Tumor*: Usually, a mass can be felt on the testicle. The mass may enlarge gradually and not hurt. Sometimes, however, it occurs in a few hours and is very painful. This happens because of bleeding

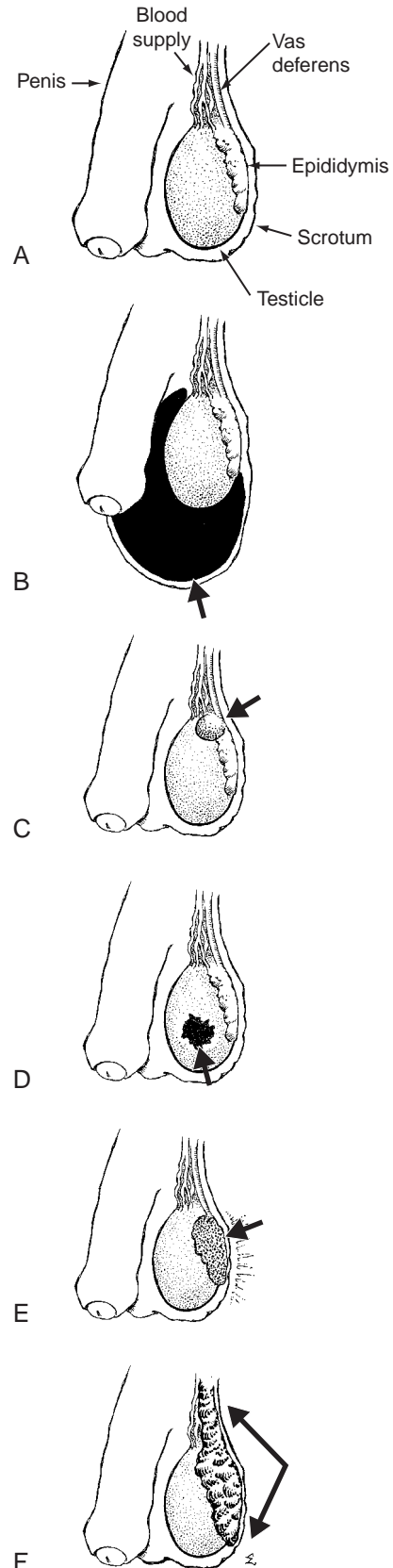


Figure 1. A, Normal contents of scrotum; B, hydrocele; C, spermatocele; D, cancer; E, acute epididymitis; F, chronic epididymitis.

within the tumor. In these circumstances, the testicle will be tender. Tumors are most commonly seen in younger men.

- *Hydrocele*: This is caused by too much fluid forming around the testicle and ballooning out the scrotum. Most of the time, the reason is not known. Sometimes fluid comes from an irritated testicle. Hydrocele can occur at any age but is most common in older adults.
- *Epididymitis*: This is an infection of the epididymis (the sperm is stored here) that spreads usually from an infection in the prostate, bladder, or penis. The skin of the scrotum is swollen, and the testicle is so tender that the person walks with a waddle so that the legs do not touch or bump the scrotum.
- *Spermatocele*: When a duct becomes blocked so that the sperm can't get past, the accumulated sperm forms a swelling (a *cyst*). It is usually the size of a cherry or cranberry.
- *Varicocele*: This is formed by the dilated veins that drain the testicle (like the varicose veins that drain

the leg). These dilated veins in the scrotum feel like a "bag of worms" and occur more often on the left side.

- *Torsion of the testicle*: The testicle can suddenly twist on itself so that the veins cannot easily drain the blood from it. This causes the testicle to become swollen and very painful. An immediate operation is necessary; otherwise the testicle may become gangrenous and die.
- *Mumps orchitis*: This condition is uncommon. It is seen mostly in adolescents and young adults a week or so after the mumps start. The testicle is large and very tender.

Finally, even with all of these tests, it is sometimes not possible to make an exact diagnosis without performing an operation to open the scrotum and look inside. Sometimes the diagnosis and the treatment have to be done at the same time in the operating room while you are asleep.

The most likely diagnosis and the way to treat it will be explained to you in detail before anything is planned or done.