

Live Well Be Well

“Let's Talk Knowing Your Body!”

Welcome to Season 5 of Live Well, Be Well! A podcast where we speak candidly about all things health and well-being! My name is Renee Dell'Acqua, and I'm a Health Educator in Health Promotion Services here at UC San Diego.

On this episode of Live Well Be Well, we discuss testicular health and the importance of knowing your body, in honor of Testicular Cancer Awareness Month!

So we hope you get inspired, we hope you feel connected, and we hope you discover new ways to live your best life. Let's get started!

CS: Hi everyone, my name is Christopher Spurling (my pronouns are he/him) and I am a Health Educator with UCSD Health Promotion Services. My speciality emphasis areas are men's health and lgbtqai2s+ health (referring to the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, asexual, intersex, and two spirit communities, plus any other identify that falls within queer-identified or trans-identified communities).

CS: April is Testicular Cancer Awareness Month, and I would like to share some information that college students should know about testicular cancer! Whether you are listening to this episode as someone who has testicles or someone who does not have testicles, it is important to know about health issues that may affect our Triton Community.

CS: I also want to address the language that we use to talk about men's health issues. Tritons come in all genders, sexualities, and types. The term “male” refers

to their anatomical identification. The term “man” refers to the social category and gender roles associated with that identification. That being said, some listeners who identify as “men” may not have “male-at-birth” anatomical characteristics. And some listeners who may not identify as “men” may have “male-at-birth” anatomical characteristics. My goal is to make all listeners feel welcomed here, and so I will refrain from using gendered terms where possible.

CS: The research, however, is not so comprehensively inclusive in their terminology. So when speaking of quote-on-quote “men” in regards to statistics or research, you can assume that I’m referring to cisgender men (cisgender, meaning that their current gender is “man” and their current sex is “male”). I hope to be able to provide updated research in more equitable terms once these studies themselves produce more inclusive results.

CS: Ok... Let’s begin with a question... What is the most common cancer among men ages 15-35? Well, you may have guessed based on this episode’s topic... that Testicular Cancer is the most common cancer among men ages 15-35. The age range of college students tends to fall in this range, so it is extremely important that we talk about these issues during college.

CS: As with any cancer, detecting it early is the best way to prevent any serious or harmful outcomes. Before going further, I want to let you know that the cure rate is described as “excellent” because it is over 95%, meaning that over 95% of people with testicular cancer are cured. One in 270 men will be diagnosed with testicular cancer, however, so while it is great that we have great medical treatments... these work best with early detection and other preventive efforts.

CS: At any given time in the US, 20,000 are surviving with testicular cancer and 200,000 have been cured, yet we don’t actually talk about testicular cancer

that often. Often college students think that cancer only affects older adults, but it is important to take steps now... waiting can be the worst thing for you, since early detection is important. While many medical professionals no longer recommend a formal testicular self-exam, there are 2 main steps you can take to keep those testicles healthy!

CS: First, regularly see your primary care physician or someone on your medical care team, and be open and honest with them when they ask you questions about your body, history, and activities you participate in. Your medical provider should let you know their recommendations for promoting testicular health, but you should feel empowered to ask if you have any questions or concerns, or if your medical provider has never brought it up then you should feel empowered to start that conversation.

CS: Second, know your normal. If you have testicles, you know that they sometimes have a mind of their own. Since they can move around, it can be hard to know what's normal for your body. Each body is different, so your "normal" will be different than someone else's. While you're welcome to explore different methods for testicular self-exams, the most important underlying idea here is that you need to be able to recognize changes in your testicles, and you won't know if something has changed if you aren't familiar with how your testicles normally are.

CS: On that note, it is also important to know what common signs and symptoms of testicular cancer are. I do want to emphasize that these can also be signs and symptoms of other conditions as well, not just testicular cancer. Overall, this list is not intended to be any sort of medical advice, but just things to look out for. And if any of these occur, it is important to speak with your medical provider as soon as possible so they can determine the cause. That being said, the

common signs and symptoms include: A painless lump or swelling in either testicle, a change in how the testicle feels, a dull ache in the lower abdomen or groin, a sudden build-up of fluid in the scrotum, and pain or discomfort in a testicle or the scrotum.

CS: While anyone with testicles has some level of risk for developing testicular cancer, there are some common risk factors that indicate that certain groups of people are at an increased risk. These risk factors include: Having an undescended testicle (which occurs in about 3% of boys), experiencing abnormal development of the testicles, having a personal or family history of testicular cancer. Also, the research indicates that white men have an increased risk of developing testicular cancer when compared to men from other races and ethnicities. If any of these risk factors apply to you, it is important to let your medical provider know, especially if you haven't shared this information with them before.

CS: Today we are joined by my colleague, Christine Glissmann, who is the Alcohol, Tobacco, and Drug Health Educator on staff here at UCSD Health Promotion Services. She will share a little about some lifestyle habits (like smoking and drinking) and their impact on someone's risk of testicular cancer. Welcome Christine!

CG: Thanks, Christopher! I'm Christine, and I'm super excited to be here and to talk about preventing testicular cancer. Jumping right in... Is smoking tobacco a risk factor for testicular cancer? Unfortunately the research is not very clear at this time. Some studies and organizations say yes, while others say no. Generally speaking, we know that smoking tobacco has negative effects on the body with prolonged use throughout the lifespan. Over time, smoking narrows and weakens some of your blood vessels, in addition to reducing the function of

blood cells to carry oxygen through the body. Since the research isn't clear either way, and since smoking tobacco can negatively impact your health anyway, it's probably best to avoid tobacco.

CS: Wow, thanks for sharing Christine! It's good to know that tobacco impacts our bodies in a lot of ways... what about alcohol?

CG: That's a great question, Christopher. Just like with tobacco, the research just isn't very clear yet. There are some individual studies that indicate alcohol use may be correlated with an increased risk of developing testicular cancer, and there's also research and organizations that say that alcohol does not have an effect. Similar to our message about tobacco... it's important to start and maintain healthy habits... and to slow or stop unhealthy ones. If you choose to drink, always drink responsibly, and be sure to regularly monitor your health, including your testicular health.

CS: Another question that comes up a lot, especially recently, is if cannabis use impacts a person's testicular cancer risk.

CG: In my literature reviews, I've noticed that there are a few studies looking at this than there are for alcohol and tobacco. That being said, there definitely needs to be more research done on the subject. For example, the Canadian Cancer Society lists cannabis as a quote-on-quote "possible" risk factor. There seems to be some causal relationship, but on the other hand some organizations don't list cannabis at all.

CS: I see... thanks for sharing all of this great information. Do you have any concluding thoughts?

CG: First and foremost, be open with your medical provider about if you are using alcohol, tobacco, cannabis, or another substance. These can be risk factors for a lot of conditions, not just testicular cancer, but your medical provider can help you navigate these concerns on an individual basis, based on you and your body. Second, know your body. Regardless of the research, it is important to recognize changes on your testicles and their functionality.

CS: Thank you again for being here, Christine. I'm glad you were able to join us and share your expertise.

CG: I'm happy to be here! Stay safe out there, Tritons!

CS: Remember, know your body and make sure those testicles are part of the conversation with your medical provider. You'll have a ball speaking with them, and they'll help you keep your testes as your besties. Much of the information and statistics for this podcast are from the websites of Johns Hopkins Medicine, the American Association for Cancer Research, the National Foundation for Cancer Research, the Canadian Cancer Society, and the Testicular Cancer Awareness Foundation.

So that concludes this episode of Live Well, Be Well! If you liked what you heard today and would like to learn more about topics related to health and well-being there's much more to come! Don't forget to follow Health Promotion Services' on Instagram and Facebook under @UCSDHPS and also check out our website healthpromotion.ucsd.edu.

Stay tuned for our next Live Well, Be Well. Until next time, be kind, be true, be you. And remember, to be well is to live well.

