

# Epididymitis

Epididymitis is an infection or inflammation of the epididymis, a structure that carries sperm from the testicles. Epididymitis can be a sexually transmitted disease, but not always. The main symptoms are pain and swelling of the scrotum (the sac containing the testicles). It is important to get medical help for this condition. Rest and antibiotics are the usual treatments.

## What is epididymitis?

Epididymitis is a painful condition caused by inflammation of the epididymis, which carries and stores sperm. It is located in the scrotum next to the testicle. Epididymitis is most common in young men. It may be caused by a sexually transmitted infection, although other sources of infection are possible. Once epididymitis is recognized, it usually improves quickly with antibiotics and other simple treatments.

Epididymitis is uncommon in boys before puberty. In this age group, swelling of the scrotum is more often caused by a condition called testicular torsion. Immediate treatment is needed—this condition can permanently damage the testicles.

 *Boys with pain in the testicles always need prompt medical attention.*

## What does it look like?

- Pain and swelling of the scrotum, often involving the testicle.
- Pain develops over a few days and may be severe.
- There may be redness on the skin of the scrotum.
- There may be a painful lump (the epididymis) on the affected testicle.
- Fever may be present.
- Sometimes, pain may occur when your child is urinating or fluid may drain from the penis.
- Can look like *testicular torsion* because of pain and swelling of the testicle.

## What causes epididymitis?

- The usual cause is infection with bacteria, spreading either from the penis or the bladder. In sexually active boys and men, the main causes are sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). The most common causes of infection are the bacteria *Chlamydia* or *Neisseria gonorrhoeae*.
- However, epididymitis is not always a sexually transmitted disease. For example, it can occur in boys or men

who have had a bladder infection. In boys before puberty, epididymitis may be associated with abnormalities of the reproductive system (testicles) or urinary system (bladder and kidneys).

## What are some possible complications of epididymitis?

- With proper treatment, complications are uncommon.
- Without treatment, the infection may spread. This can cause damage to the reproductive organs, possibly including infertility.

## What increases the risk of epididymitis?

- When epididymitis is from a sexually transmitted disease, the main risk factors are having a lot of partners and not using a condom every time you have sex.
- Bladder infections and other infections of the reproductive organs may also lead to epididymitis. Other abnormalities or previous surgery of the reproductive or urinary organs also increases the risk.

## Can epididymitis be prevented?

- Not having sex is the best way to prevent epididymitis and other STDs. If you are sexually active, limit the number of your sex partners.
- Use a condom every time you have sex.

## How is epididymitis diagnosed?

- Your doctor can usually tell whether epididymitis is present based on symptoms and a physical examination.
- If there is any doubt, an ultrasound examination may be performed. This is done to make sure there isn't another cause of pain and swelling, especially testicular torsion.
- Urinalysis and tests for STDs are done.

## How is epididymitis treated?

- *Eliminating the infection.*
  - Antibiotics are prescribed. The exact antibiotic depends on the identified or most likely cause of the infection.
  - Make sure to finish the antibiotic prescription, even if symptoms have gotten better. Stopping treatment too early may allow the infection to come back.
  - If the epididymitis is from a STD, sexual partners may need to be tested and treated as well.

- *Treating pain and swelling.*
  - Rest.
  - Support for the scrotum: wear briefs rather than boxer shorts.
  - Take medications for pain, such as acetaminophen or ibuprofen.
  - Pain and swelling usually improve within a few days after the start of treatment. If not, call our office.



### **When should I call your office?**

- Call our office if symptoms of epididymitis (swelling of the scrotum, pain of the testicles) do not improve within a few days, or if they get worse.
- Call our office if symptoms of testicular torsion develop, especially sudden, severe, or increasing pain and tenderness of the scrotum. *This is an emergency!*

