Undescended Testicles

BIRTH DEFECT RESEARCH FOR CHILDREN

What are Undescended Testicles?

Testicles are the reproductive glands of the male. Normally, the two testicles are located in the scrotum (the sac under the penis). The testicles are responsible for the production of sperm and the male hormone testosterone. The testicles of the male fetus form inside the abdomen, and shortly before birth, descend from the abdomen down into their normal place in the scrotum. An Undescended Testicle is a birth defect found in boys when the testicle fails to move into the normal position in the scrotum. The medical term for this condition is Cryptorchidism and it can affect one or both testicles.

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How many boys have Undescended Testicles?

Undescended Testicles are one of the most common malformations in newborn boys. The condition occurs in 2-3% of full-term male newborns. In most cases, the undescended testicles will descend into proper position by the child's first birthday. In premature and low birth weight newborns, the rate of occurrence increases. The occurrence can be as high as 17% for premature boys weighing less than 5 pounds and nearly 100% for those weighing less than 2 pounds.

How do you know if your son has Undescended Testicles?

Several examinations may be necessary to be sure your child has Undescended Testicles and not Retractile Testicles. A retractile testicle resides in the scrotum but temporarily pulls up into the groin area. This condition usually corrects itself and requires no treatment. The evaluation for your child will include a thorough history and a physical examination including an inspection of his testicles. Diagnostic tests such as ultrasound or other imaging may be necessary. Your child will be diagnosed with Undescended Testicles if the testicles cannot be felt or manipulated down into the scrotum.

What causes Undescended Testicles?

It is not certain what causes Undescended Testicles. The condition is believed to occur around the seventh month of pregnancy when the testicles of a fetus normally begin their descent from the abdomen to the scrotum. Possible reasons for the condition include insufficient hormones to stimulate normal development of the testicles, abnormal testicular response to the hormones, or a physical blockage (such as a hernia) which prevents normal descent. In many cases, the baby is born before the testicles have descended into the scrotum. This is the reason why the condition is so common in premature infants.

What is the treatment for Undescended Testicles?

Undescended testicles are frequently associated with hernias so parents should watch for swelling or a lump in the baby's groin area. Generally, surgery is needed if the testicle has not descended within your child's first year. Surgery is often performed as early as the age of six months to decrease the possibility of infertility. The surgery, called orchiopexy, brings the testicle down and places it in the proper position in the scrotum. The surgery consists of incisions in the groin and scrotum and sutures to secure the testicle in place in the scrotum. If a congenital hernia is present, it will be repaired during this surgery. Orchiopexy is usually done on an outpatient basis. However, your child may be required to stay overnight if he has other medical problems or if both testicles need to be corrected. The procedure usually causes very little discomfort although the scrotum can remain swollen and black and blue for several weeks.

Hormone injection treatments have been used as an alternative to surgery. This treatment typically involves several injections over a 3-5 week period. However, this treatment is typically successful in only 10-30% of the cases.

What's in the future for a boy with Undescended Testicles?

Studies show that boys born with Undescended Testicles have an increased risk of infertility. The abdomen maintains a higher temperature than the scrotal area and is not conducive for normal sperm production. Therefore, the earlier an undescended

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testicle is corrected, the better the chances of fertility. These children also have a greater risk of developing testicular cancer, though it may not occur until after the age of 40. As your child gets older, he should be taught by a physician to examine his testicles periodically for irregularities or bumps. Testicular cancer is highly curable when detected and treated early.

Fact Sheet by:

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