



Undescended and Retractable Testicles

Sometimes, after a male baby is born, one or both of the testicles stays inside the body instead of moving down into the scrotum. This may mean that your child has retractile testicles or undescended testicles.

Testicles, also called testes, are the two oval shaped glands in boys that sit in the scrotum, or sac, below the penis. They make sperm and produce hormones.

Before a male baby is born, the testicles develop inside the body, near the kidneys. During the last few months of pregnancy, the testicles travel down into the scrotum.

Sometimes, after a male baby is born, one or both of the testicles stays inside the stomach area instead of moving down into the scrotum. If this is true for your child, they may have one of these conditions:

- Retractable testicles
- Undescended testicles

It is important to find out which condition your child has. Retractable testicles usually get better on their own as your child grows. Your child might need surgery for undescended testicles.

How will my child's provider diagnose my child's condition?

Part of finding out your child's condition will be to find out if your child's testicles are palpable or not. Palpable testicles mean that your child's provider can feel where your child's testicles are. Your child's provider will do a simple physical exam to diagnose this.

If your child's testicle or testicles are not in their scrotum, your child's provider will try to gently push the testicle down from the stomach area. To do this, your child's provider may put lotion on their fingertips and then slide their hand along the area of your child's stomach from where the testicles descend. They will start putting firm pressure near the kidney and move down to the scrotum to feel for the testicle and see if it is palpable.

A testicle that cannot be felt on physical examination is called non-palpable. They may be located in the abdomen, be absent or be very small (atrophic). It is very important to find out where they are because a testicle left inside the abdomen could form a tumor later in life. This kind of tumor may go undetected until it becomes large or causes symptoms. Unfortunately, there is no radiologic study, such as an ultrasound, that can find out for sure if a testicle is present. This situation always requires surgery. Most surgeons use a technique called laparoscopy for this. In some rare cases hormones can help non-palpable testicles move down into the scrotum. If it is appropriate, your child's provider may recommend a hormone shot to help make this happen.

To Learn More

- Urology 206-987-2509
- Ask your child's healthcare provider
- www.seattlechildrens.org

Free Interpreter Services

- In the hospital, ask your child's nurse.
- From outside the hospital, call the toll-free Family Interpreting Line 1-866-583-1527. Tell the interpreter the name or extension you need.

What are retractile testicles?

Retractable testicles are sometimes in the scrotum and sometimes inside the body near the stomach area. During an exam, an experienced provider can usually gently push a retractile testicle into the scrotum. The testicle may not stay in the scrotum and may retract or move back up into the stomach area.

What are undescended testicles?

Undescended testicles, also called UDT or cryptorchidism (kript-ORK-id-izm), are testicles that are not in the scrotum and cannot be gently pushed or coaxed down into the sac.

What is the treatment for retractile testicles and UDT?

Retractable testicles do not require any treatment. When your child becomes a teenager, their testicles will usually stop retracting and will stay in the scrotum.

UDT requires day surgery to bring the testicle or testicles into the scrotum. Your child should be at least 6 months old before they get surgery for UDT.

Why is surgery recommended for UDT?

Testicles that stay inside the stomach area at all times can develop problems. Your child's testicles may not be able to make sperm if they are not in the scrotum. There may also be problems with their testicles making hormones. We recommend surgery for UDT to prevent these problems. Surgery is not needed for retractile testicles because they are in the scrotum often enough not to cause problems with sperm and hormones.

If your child has UDT, even after they have had surgery, it is important to watch for testicular cancer. Adult males who have had UDT are slightly more likely than other adult males to develop cancer of the testicle. All males should do routine self-exams on their testicles from puberty on. When testicles are in the scrotum they can be easily self-examined. Your child's provider can tell your child how to do this.