

TRUE LIFE STORY

I Survived Cancer!



MARC CURLEWIS WAS LOOKING FORWARD TO CELEBRATING HIS 30TH BIRTHDAY. AFTER ALL, ONE ONLY HITS THE BIG 'THREE-OH' ONCE. HOWEVER, FIVE DAYS BEFORE HIS BIRTHDAY, HE RECEIVED DEVASTATING NEWS.

THE DIAGNOSIS

Marc had been experiencing some discomfort in his right testicle and decided to go and get it checked out. At first, his doctor thought it was an infection, but when a month long course of antibiotics did nothing to relieve the pain and discomfort; she referred him to an urologist.

After running a few tests, the urologist informed Marc that he suspected testicular cancer. So, with very little time for the news to sink in, Marc was booked to undergo surgery immediately. Although he did not know what to expect, Marc was hopeful and tried to remain positive.

Having established the full extent of the cancer, the surgeons removed his right testicle. Thankfully, because he had been informed about the warning signs of testicular cancer from a young age, the early diagnosis meant that the cancer had not spread to his lymph nodes.

"I think initially I was shocked, as you always expect something like that to [happen to] other people and never to you. This was followed by fear, but, after the operation, tests and a little bit of research on my part I felt a lot better about it."

THE ROAD TO RECOVERY

After undergoing a series of x-rays, scans and blood tests to determine whether the cancer had spread, Marc's oncologist recommended two doses of chemotherapy to make sure that no undetected cancer cells would be left in his body. Although the two heavy doses of chemotherapy were not only physically but emotionally draining also, Marc managed to take it all in his stride. He did some research and made an effort to keep informed about what he was undergoing. This, and a lot of support from family and friends, got him through the rough patches.

"Chemo is quite a scary thing to go through but I found that by doing a bit of research and educating myself with [sic] what to expect I did not have any problems handling it emotionally."

SPEAKING OUT

Testicular cancer is the most common cancer in young men. It most commonly occurs in men between the ages of fifteen and thirty-nine years of age, and yet it is a little talked about issue in our society. However, Marc is quite outspoken about his experience. "I don't really think I ever really made a conscious decision about whether I would speak about my condition or not. I think it basically came down to not being embarrassed about my condition, so when anyone asked me anything it was just natural for me to give them an answer.

I think that it was also maybe a way to deal with it, and that by being open about it I could maybe help other men that were unsure about testicular cancer or maybe dealing with the same problems but feel too embarrassed to ask any questions."

Although testicular cancer cannot be prevented, it is one of the most treatable cancers if detected early enough. It's important for one to know the signs and symptoms, as well as to do regular self-examinations. According to the Cancer Association of South Africa (CANSA), from puberty onwards, young men should spend at least ten minutes a month examining their testicles.

INVEST IN YOUR HEALTH

Marc Curlewis is just one of the many young men affected by testicular cancer.

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His story is an example of how important it is for one to invest in their health. For Marc, knowing what signs to look out for helped his doctors diagnose the cancer early, before it was too late.

"Just make sure to do regular self-checks and don't feel too embarrassed to see a doctor if you find any problems. The quicker it is discovered the better your prognosis. And having testicular cancer or [the] loss of a testicle does not make you any less of a man."

HOW TO PERFORM THIS EXAMINATION:

Marc shared some tips on how to conduct a Testicular Self-Exam (TSE):

Stand nude in front of a mirror. Check for any swelling on the scrotal skin. Examine each testicle with both hands.

Place the index and middle fingers under the testicle with the thumbs placed on top. Roll the testicle gently between the thumbs and fingers. You shouldn't feel any pain when doing the exam. Don't be alarmed if one testicle seems slightly larger than the other, that's normal.

Find the epididymis: the soft, tube-like structure behind the testicle that collects and carries sperm. If you are familiar with this structure, you won't mistake it for a suspicious lump.

Cancerous lumps usually are found on the sides of the testicle but can also show up on the front. Lumps on or attached to the epididymis are not cancerous.

If you find a lump on your testicle, see a doctor, preferably an urologist, right away. The abnormality may not be cancer, but if it is testicular cancer, it will spread if not checked by appropriate treatment. Even if it is something else, like an infection, you are still going to need to see a doctor. Waiting and hoping will not fix anything.

Please note that free-floating lumps in the scrotum that are not attached in any way to a testicle are not testicular cancer. When in doubt, get it checked out - if only for peace of mind!

Cancer affects us all.

For more information, call the CANSA toll free line 0800 226622

or visit

www.cansa.org.za