



## Interview Transcript: Mark

Mark is a health information specialist. He is married with two young children.

Type of Cancer: Testicular

Age at Diagnosis: 38

Year of Diagnosis: 2008

Treatment: Surgery

Date of Interview: August 2009

My name is Mark Mycyk and I am 38 years old. I discovered that I had a lump on one of my testicles at Christmas of 2008. And within a month I had been diagnosed and been treated for testicular cancer.

The advice I would give to somebody who is going through this: there are going to be a lot of different stages of your emotions. And obviously when you're first aware of this, that this is real—I was in denial to begin with: "This can't be real." I think that this is quite common. And so that was in December/January, beginning of January—what a way to start a new year. And I guess I was looking for cues to grab a hold of so I could feel more hope that this isn't the end, you know, and I guess the long-story-short of all of that is that I ended up having—with the diagnosis, it was a precancerous growth. I'm very relieved to know now that first it was the less aggressive form of cancer and it was caught really early and I'm being screened now regularly for further growth.

### Early days

It went from worst case to best case quite quickly. I mean, when you hear the word cancer, all that feeling around having cancer was really prominent. I don't know if you want to call it a stigma but at least all the stereotypes and concerns that people have, trying to tell them that I had cancer. And it was trying to tell because it was hard for me as I'm 39 years old, I should be in my prime and I should be strong, with a family of two young children, and I didn't want this to be happening to me. So all those early stages of "Why?" then, "Why me? I don't have any history of cancer in my family, I eat healthy, for many years I was vegetarian, how could this possibly be?"

All the precursors to having cancer didn't make sense to me, but there I was and this is the reality I'll deal with. So I wanted to find out as much as possible so that not only could I lower any fears that my family and friends would have but also that I had, because I wanted to know everything I could about the tumour. So I went on the Internet looking for things and tried to lower my anxiety around it because I wanted to get through this.

### **Who to tell first**

It's interesting about telling family and friends. My family has never been all that close so to talk about personal things is not very common. And so talking to them about that—I wasn't sure. I mean it was going through my mind a lot to try and figure out a strategy to tell all my family. Will I tell my mom first or my brother first? How was I going to do it? And I did feel like I wanted to tell them in person. But there wasn't any time for me to be able to drive—my family is out of town—so I knew I was going to have to tell them over the phone. And I thought about telling my brother first because I thought he'd be able to help me tell my mother.

Turns out I told my mother first and that was a better strategy because she was far more calm about what was going to happen, listening to what I had to say. She actually guided me on, "Realize your brother's going to be upset," and he was. He was very concerned about myself first of all and then he was very concerned about what that meant for the rest of the family.

### **Talking to our kids**

Having two young kids and talking to them about cancer, we didn't. Because I didn't need chemotherapy or radiation, the physical signs of me having cancer weren't going to be noticed. We were concerned about the anxiety that it would create in a seven and a five yearold to know that their father has cancer, so we chose not to say that I had cancer. We'll probably tell them, I don't know at what age, but we'll tell them at some point in the future about that. Maybe this video might allow them to be aware of it, and now questions: do you go back in time and say that we didn't tell them something, and they might be angry. But that was a choice we made at the time and hopefully they'll understand that we chose not to tell them just so they wouldn't be overly concerned at the time.

### **The surgery**

Having a testicle removed is something that I'm living with every day, which I think is probably... I think about it; I miss my boy. But, given the alternate, it's something that I can be comfortable with, at least knowing that this has been taken care of and it has almost no impact on my life now. Really I'm no different today than I was December 31st before my diagnosis. And so if you can have this minimally—really—invasive surgery—I was out in a day, the impact for me was very minor, and rather than the potential for this to spread into other types of cancer, let's get on prevention or early detection and treatment.

### **What I would tell my best friend**

It's not going to be easy, it's going to be an emotional rollercoaster right from the beginning, right through their treatment. To me, I guess everyone deals with things differently but to me, I wanted to know as much information as I could. And I'm a person who's always seeking different people's opinions. I do have a friend who is a doctor; I sought his opinion. I did searches on the Internet and every time... and I wanted to inform myself as much as possible, so I could... And this is what I would tell friends, I would tell them to get as much information so you can ask as many questions. Because I think once you have the information, you can process it better, even though if you can't handle it at that point, you might want to come back to it over time. Don't do this by yourself. Go looking for support even though it's embarrassing, even though it's stressful for yourself, once you share that stress it becomes less.

## **The balance**

The positives that have come out of it is reaffirming sort of the lifestyle choices of exercise and healthy diets and removing stress and the focus on family. I think that I was really career driven before. Not that I have taken a step away from my focus on my career, but I now want to make sure that I have time in the day for my family and friends and for myself because that's the balance, right? That it's not just about the outcomes of my work. I mean, we all know that, it's obvious, but it takes something like a lifethreatening incident that reminds you.