

# GUIDE TO SEX & RELATIONSHIPS



Let's talk about sex, baby. No, we're not going to break down the birds and the bees for you, you have the internet for that. We're here to talk about how cancer affects your sex life.

Sex is an important part of our lives - it supports our physical, mental, and emotional health. But, when you or your partner is diagnosed with cancer, your sex life may change in unexpected ways. Your doctor may not bring up how cancer and treatment will impact your sex life - both now and in the future - and you may be feeling confused about that part of your new reality.

We're here to make sure cancer doesn't become the elephant in the bedroom. You can get back between the sheets, but not if nobody's talking about it. This guide will help you navigate sex, both during and after cancer, as a patient or as a partner.

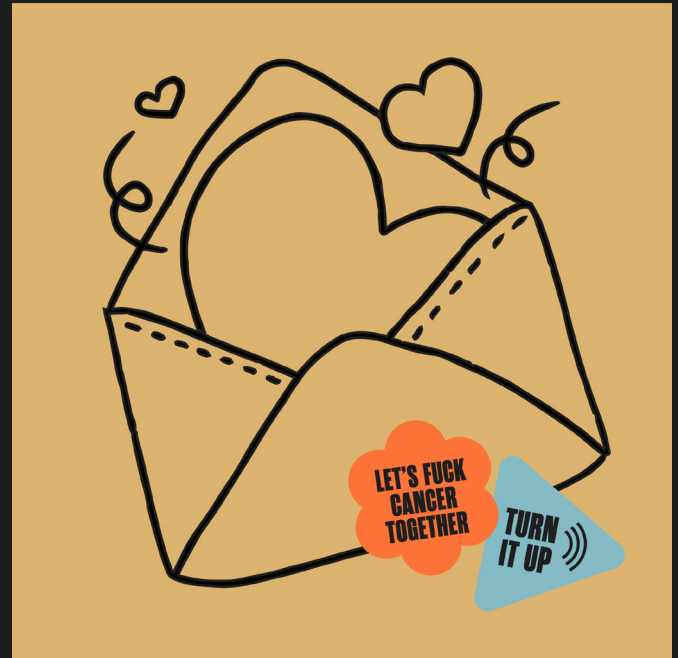


For Patients:

# INTIMACY DURING CANCER

EVERYONE'S DIFFERENT

After a cancer diagnosis, you might notice that everything stays the same or that there are some changes to your sex life, like a different level of interest or physical ability to engage in sex than before. It doesn't matter what your sex life looks like after diagnosis, as long as you're content with that aspect of your life.



In general, it's fine to engage in sexual activity during cancer treatment. As always, consult your doctor if you have specific questions or concerns regarding sex and cancer. It's also totally okay and normal to not be interested in or capable of having sex right now. Your experience is personal and unique to you.

## Cancer can affect your sex life in many ways, such as:

- Physical ability to engage in sexual activity
- Interest in sex
- Increased emotions such as fear, anxiety, or anger
- New feelings about your body

It's important to remember if you are struggling with your self image or physical aspects of your sex life during cancer that it won't stay this way forever.



## Find support

Talking to people who understand what you're going through can help you feel more supported. Try connecting with a support group or mental health professional in your area.



## Exercise

Moving your body releases endorphins, which in turn can help you think more positively.



## Communicate

Talk to your partner and/or loved ones about how you're feeling about your body. Having open and honest conversations about your new reality can help you work through your feelings. Your partner will only know how to support you if you share with them.

# TIPS TO NAVIGATE:



## Think outside the box.

It's not all about sex!

- Try kissing, cuddling, massaging, and manual or oral stimulation.
- Check out pornographic content (video, audio, novels).
- Try different positions.
- Set the mood using candles or soft lighting.
- Try using a vibrator or other toys for extra stimulation (you can buy these online if going to the store feels like too much).
- Play out a sexual fantasy - by yourself or with a partner - to help you relax and distract you.
- If you're tired a lot, try engaging in sexual activity when you have the most energy, like right after a nap.



## Be patient.

Give yourself space

- This is a new part of life. It might take a few tries to find a position that is comfortable or to work up enough energy for sex. You're struggling, you're learning, you're growing - and it's all hard! Be patient with yourself and your partner as you navigate this time.
- Changing bodies are challenging no matter when in life it happens, so be kind with yourself. Practice giving yourself compliments on both physical and non-physical attributes (i.e. your kindness, your intellect, your laugh, your sexy bod, your strength).



## Communicate, communicate, communicate.

How else is your partner going to know what you're thinking?

- It's important to have open and honest conversations with your partner about how you're both feeling emotionally and physically. Tell them how your diagnosis makes you feel about your body, how they can support you emotionally, what parts of your body are in pain, and what feels good when you're being sexual together. Leave space for them to share their feelings with you, too.
- Starting a conversation about your sex life with your partner is important. Partners of cancer patients are often waiting for them to make the first move and confirm their interest in maintaining a sex life.



## Talk to your doctor.

They are the experts after all.

- You may be sick of seeing your doctor after all of your appointments, but if you have questions about your sex life with cancer, ask them! Your doctor knows your health and medical risks best, so they are your best resource (despite all the super helpful tips we're giving you here!). There are also sex therapists you can talk to.
- If you have a low blood cell or platelet count, you need to be particularly careful during sex because you have an increased risk of infection or bleeding. Talk to your doctor to learn more.
- You might have a hormone imbalance due to your cancer that is impacting your interest and ability to have sex. Ask your doctor for a referral to an endocrinologist - someone with specialized training in hormones - if you think this might be the case.

## Here are some conversation starters you can try out:

- What do you enjoy most about our sex life?
- Is there anything that makes you nervous about our sex life now that I have cancer?
- How do you think my cancer might affect our sex life?
- What do you think is important for us to discuss before we engage in sexual activity?
- I want to continue our sex life during my treatment, but you should know a few things first. For example, some positions may be painful now that didn't hurt before. But, I'm willing to try if you are!
- How would you feel if I wanted to bring some sex toys in to our relationship? I think it might improve our sex life as my body is changing due to cancer.
- I'm not really into having sex right now, but it has nothing to do with how sexy you are.

## Things to keep in mind if/when you do engage in sexual activity:

- Keep an eye out for any sores, bumps, or warts on you or your partner's genitals
- Keep an eye out for unusual discharge or fluids.
- Use a barrier method of contraception, such as a female or male condom, to protect yourself from contracting a sexually transmitted infection (STI).
- Try to prevent urinary tract infections (UTIs) by peeing immediately after sex.
- Use a water-based lubricant if you or your partner is experiencing pain during penetrative sex.



# TREATMENT & YOUR SEX LIFE

As a rule of thumb, if you are well enough to be in public then you're well enough to have sex. But, cancer treatment can seriously weaken your immune system, making it even more important to avoid sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

## How can I prevent STIs?

- Wash your hands & genitals before engaging in sexual activity.
- Use a barrier method of contraception (i.e. male or female condom) even if you're using another form of contraception.
- Using sex toys? Make sure to wash them with hot, soapy water every time you use them.

You're not only dealing with your cancer diagnosis, but the side effects of your treatment might also be impacting your sex life. For example, you may experience nausea and/or vomiting due to your treatment. If you are, start by talking to your doctor about preventative measures that may help you avoid nausea and/or vomiting in the future. While the main solution to nausea and vomiting is medicine, you can also try acupuncture or acupressure, guided imagery to focus on positive images, or relaxation techniques such as breathing exercises and meditation. If nausea and/or vomiting are hindering your sex life, you can also try to drink water prior to sex to settle your stomach, avoid foods that aggravate your nausea (such as greasy or strong-smelling foods), and avoid sex during times of the day that you feel most nauseated.



## Chemotherapy

While chemotherapy is busy battling the cancerous cells in your body, it can also disrupt your normal sex life.

### Here are some changes you might notice:

- Fatigue
- Nausea
- Decreased interest in sex
- Weight loss or gain
- Vaginal dryness, yeast infections, irregular or no periods

### Other important things to keep in mind:

- Chemo drugs can be excreted through semen and vaginal fluids. It is important to use a barrier method of contraception (female or male condom) to protect your partner from the chemo drugs - during both oral sex and intercourse. Ask your doctor how long after a chemo treatment you need to be worried about exposing your partner.
- Pregnancy should be avoided during chemotherapy as it can lead to birth defects. Use a reliable form of birth control even if you think there is a chance that you or your partner could get pregnant.
- If you've had genital warts or herpes in the past, chemotherapy can cause them to become active again. Talk to your doctor if you notice symptoms.



## Radiation

### Side effects of radiation:

- Fatigue
- Skin reactions
- Changes to sleep

Radiation therapy that targets your pelvic area can have a particularly large impact on your sex life. It can cause bladder or bowel problems that can make sex challenging. Sex-specific side effects of radiation:

### Female: Radiation around your pelvis can...

- Damage your ovaries and impact the amount of hormones you produce, which can impact your interest in sex
- Cause your periods to become irregular or stop altogether
- Lead to early menopause, which can make sex painful, particularly penetration

### Male: Radiation around your pelvis can....

- Damage the nerves and blood vessels in the penis
- Cause some level of erectile dysfunction
- Create pain during ejaculation
- Lead to dry orgasms (where you reach orgasm, but don't release any semen)
- Impact your testicles, which can cause you to lose interest in sex

**You may be wondering:** If I get radiation treatment, will my partner also be exposed to radiation during sex?

**Answer:** No, as long as it's radiation therapy from an external machine then you are not radioactive and won't put your partner in any danger during sex. But, if you've received radioactive seeds in your body (brachytherapy), you should talk to your doctor about when the strongest radiation will have left your body and you can get back to sexual activity.



## Managing a Stoma

If your cancer treatment has left you with an opening in your body (to remove urine or stool, or allow you to speak or breathe.....all the important things!), your confidence or self-image may have taken a hit. This, of course, can impact your sex life. However, an enjoyable sex life is still possible with a stoma, it just might take some extra TLC and planning.

### Tips if you have a colostomy or urostomy:

- As you prepare for sexual activity, change your bag and check the seal to prevent leaks.
  - Try having sex in the shower or bath.
  - Get a cover for your bag - out of sight, out of mind!
  - Wear a smaller bag during sex, or use a cap or plug if you can.
  - Wear what makes you feel good - if you feel sexy, you are sexy.
  - Tape the pouch to your body to stop it from flapping during sex.
  - Try positions that keep your partner's weight off your stoma.
  - Wear perfume or cologne to help with odors.
- Tips if you have a tracheostomy:**
- Before you start, discuss what you and your partner like sexually.
  - Come up with creative ways to communicate during sex.
  - Show your partner what you need by guiding their hands or using body language.
  - Wear a cover, scarf, or necklace if it makes you feel more confident.
  - Wear perfume or cologne, and avoid garlic or spicy foods to help with odors.



## Recovering from Surgery

If you've recently had surgery as part of your cancer treatment, ask your doctor when you can start having sex again. Sometimes, sex can strain the incision from surgery, which increases your chance of infection, so practice caution and follow your doctor's guidance.



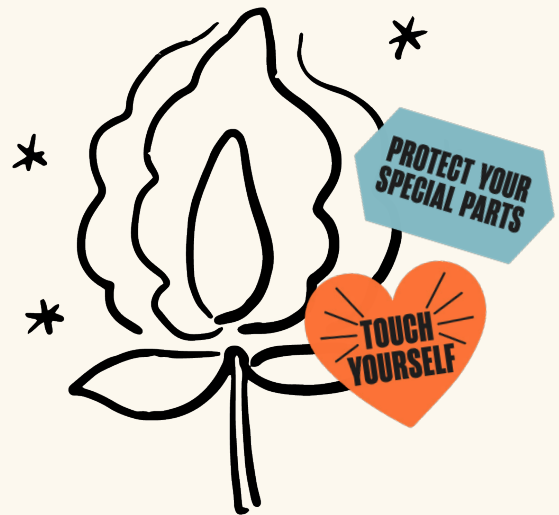
## Dealing with Incontinence

You may be experiencing temporary or permanent loss of control over your bladder or bowel. While this can be embarrassing or uncomfortable, you are still totally able to engage in sexual activity.

### We have some tricks to help you feel sexy:

- Have sex in the shower or bath.
- Practice those kegels and other pelvic floor exercises.
- Try having sex when you are most energized and have the most muscle control.
- Empty your bladder and bowel before initiating sexual activity.
- Try to avoid foods & drinks that can irritate your bladder and bowel such as alcohol, caffeine, carbonated drinks, fruit juices, spicy food, and citrus.

# FOR WOMEN & PEOPLE WITH VAGINAS



Women and men may have different concerns and experiences when it comes to having sex with cancer. Research has found that women with cancer struggle with body image and physical changes that impact their sex lives. Below you will find a list of common physical and mental changes that you may be experiencing, as well as tips to address them in relation to your sex life.



## Mental Changes/Concerns

- Struggling with your body image in ways you never have before
- Decreased or loss of sexual desire
- Feelings of sadness, disappointment, or loss due to changing sex life
- Feeling blindsided by changes to your life



## Tips/Suggestions

- Find a support group or mental health professional that you can speak with about your shifting body image.
- Learn a new skill or pick up a new hobby to boost confidence.
- Focus on what makes you feel good. Look in the mirror and tell yourself all the things you find attractive about yourself.
- If you can, treat yourself to things that make you feel better - a haircut, manicure, or massage.
- If you're feeling self-conscious during sex, try wearing lingerie or other clothing to shift focus away from the areas that you feel less confident about, or dim the lights during sex.
- Try methods of intimacy that don't require penetration, like hugging, holding hands, or massages.
- Use a lubricant, vaginal moisturizer, vaginal estrogen, or dilator to increase comfort during sexual activity.
- Exercise regularly, or try out new types of exercise.
- Learn relaxation techniques.



## Physical Changes/Concerns

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| → Vaginal penetration has become painful | → Numbness in previously sensitive areas |
| → Fatigue                                | → Early menopause                        |
| → Difficulty achieving orgasm            | → Hot flashes                            |
| → Decreased sexual interest or desire    | → Night sweats                           |
| → Sex is no longer pleasurable           | → Nausea & vomiting                      |
| → Increased vaginal dryness              | → Feeling sore or uncomfortable          |
| → Vaginal irritation                     | → Weight gain                            |

If your ovaries are removed or affected by chemo or radiation, or you are getting hormone therapy, you may be experiencing hot flashes. The hot flashes should stop as your body gets used to the treatment or when hormone therapy is over. Hot flashes can be incredibly uncomfortable and impact your sex life, especially if this is the first time you're dealing with them.

### Try these tips to decrease the intensity of your hot flashes:

- Wear light clothing in layers that you can easily remove.
- Run cold water on a cloth and use it to cool yourself down.
- Splash cool water on your wrists or roll a cold bottle or can between your wrists.
- Try to identify what triggers your hot flashes and then avoid those triggers as much as possible (think alcohol, hot drinks, etc).
- Try sleeping alone in a separate - and cooler - room.

# FOR MEN & PEOPLE WITH PENISES

Men with cancer can experience both physical and mental changes to their sex lives. Research has found that the majority of mental challenges that men with cancer face are due to an inability to engage in sex the way they were able to prior to their diagnosis. Men with cancer often struggle to cope with their changed sexual abilities.



## Changes in Sexual Activity

The following changes to sexual activity are common in men with cancer:

- Inability to get or maintain an erection
- Premature ejaculation or urination during ejaculation
- Retrograde ejaculation where your semen mixes with urine instead of exiting through the penis. This is not harmful, but does make you infertile
- Dry orgasm where there is little to no semen released during an orgasm, but your orgasm may still be pleasurable
- Pain during sex
- Decrease or loss of sexual desire
- Embarrassment about changing sex life

While these physical changes are completely normal, they may lead to anxiety or depression, or cause you to question your masculinity in relation to your sexual capabilities.



## Chemotherapy

- It is important to avoid sex or use a barrier method of contraceptives (i.e. condoms) for at least a few days after getting chemo because the drugs can be transferred to your partner by accident. This is true for everyone, regardless of sexual orientation.
- It is important to avoid causing pregnancy during and shortly after chemo because it can damage the DNA in sperm cells, which can lead to birth defects. Ask your doctor about birth control if your partner might get pregnant.



## Tips/Suggestions

- If you're having erection challenges, you can still have orgasms and be fertile.
- Sex is possible with a half-erect penis. Try experimenting with different positions.
- Emotions are powerful and can impact your physical health. Worrying about being able to perform sexually may be intensifying your challenges with sex. Try finding a support group or mental health professional you can talk to.
- Changes to your sex life can be upsetting or embarrassing. It's important to take time to adjust to changes, and talk honestly with your partner about your feelings and concerns.
- Talk to your doctor about treatments that may benefit your sex life -- pelvic floor physiotherapy, follow-up surgeries, medicines, or sex therapy.
- You may leak urine when you become aroused or during ejaculation. This doesn't harm your partner, but you can ask your doctor about using a constriction band to prevent urine from leaking out during sexual activity.
- Erectile dysfunction may be temporary or permanent. Ask your doctor for more information.
- Communicate openly and honestly with your partner before and after sex. Work together to find what satisfies you both.
- If you're experiencing premature ejaculation, try incorporating more foreplay, having sex on a towel, having sex in the shower or bath, or using a condom.
- Be patient. It can take time to get used to a new way of doing things.
- Try out new sex toys.
- Try non-penetrative methods of sexual activity and intimacy -- cuddling, kissing, oral and manual sex, masturbation.
- Focus on what makes you feel good. Look in the mirror and tell yourself all the things you find attractive about yourself.
- If you can, treat yourself to things that make you feel better like a haircut or massage.
- If you're feeling self-conscious during sex, try wearing clothing to shift focus away from the areas that you feel less confident about, or dim the lights during sex.



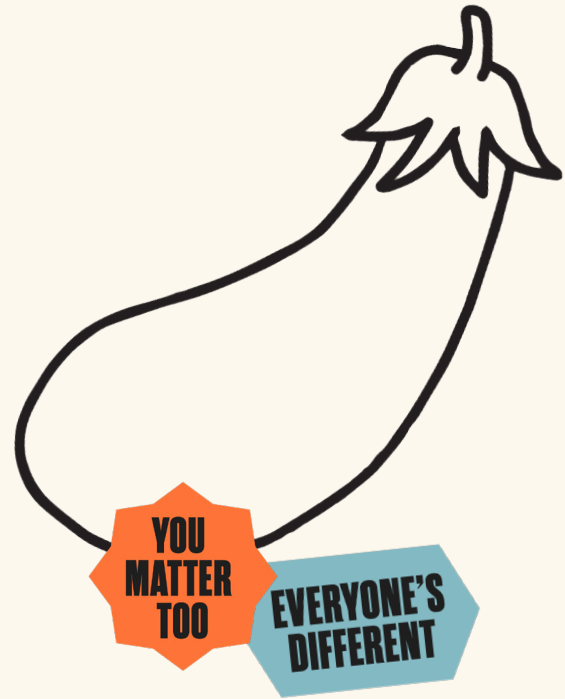
## Sex with men

### Gay, bisexual or other men who have sex with men:

Gay, bisexual, and other men who have sex with men experience changes to their sex life due to cancer in unique ways compared to straight men. In particular, many gay men emphasize the importance of sexual activity in relation to their identity as a gay man. If you are dealing with a loss of sexual functioning, you may also be struggling with understanding your manhood and masculinity. You may feel sad, depressed, or a loss of self. Try channeling those feelings into new activities that can assuage any negative feelings.

Depending on the type of cancer you have and your treatment regimen, you may now have trouble achieving a strong enough erection to be a top. If you are comfortable, consider being a bottom. However, some men who have been treated for prostate or other genital cancers report changes to anal sensitivity and pain during anal sex.

It can be helpful to find a support group or therapist who specializes in treating people with cancer who are gay, bi, or other men who have sex with men. Finding other men who can relate to your experience will help you navigate this period of your life and find support through community.





# WHAT IF I'M SINGLE AND (MAYBE) READY TO MINGLE?

If you're single when you're diagnosed with cancer, you likely have a lot of questions and concerns about dating with cancer.

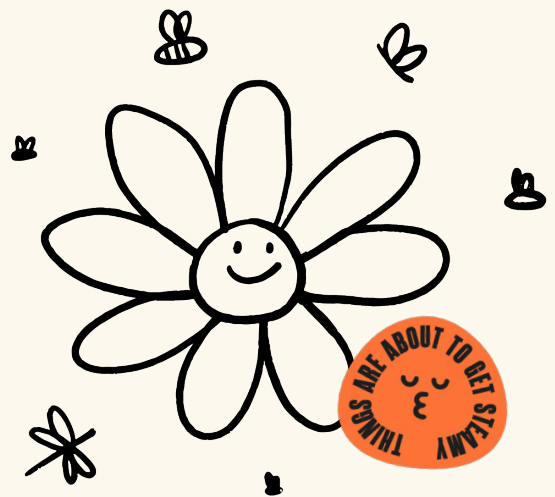
**When do I tell a new partner about my cancer?  
Do all partners need to know I have cancer?  
What if my partner gets scared away when I tell them about my cancer?**

If you're interested in dating, you might be worried that a new partner will be upset or shocked by your cancer, that sex might be painful due to your cancer, or that you will no longer feel sexual or attractive. Or, maybe you have no interest in dating right now - that's okay too. You should proceed with your love life and engage in sexual activity as it feels right to you.

Finding a new partner or telling someone you've been casually dating about your cancer diagnosis and treatment can feel particularly daunting. Here are a few tips to navigate the conversations and experiences to come.

## Tips to prepare for dating someone new:

- Talk to a trusted friend or family member. If you're comfortable, show them any scars or changes to your body. This can help you feel more confident when you're ready to show your body to a new partner.
- Take your time to accept changes to your body before deciding to share them with a new partner.
- Your fertility (including the ability to have children) may have changed due to your cancer treatment. Figuring out how to tell a new partner about this aspect of your cancer might be hard, but it's an important conversation to have.
- It's possible that you could have an even stronger desire for sex and/or intimacy in your life than before cancer. A cancer diagnosis can bring up very strong emotions, which can be difficult to cope with if you're single. Try sharing your feelings with close friends and family. The right person will present themselves in time and be able to give you the support you need.



**We all know that dating is hard, even when you aren't dealing with cancer. But, when you're ready to start dating, consider these tips:**

- Communicate openly and honestly with your partner. They can't support you in the right way if they don't know how you feel about your diagnosis, that sex might be painful for you, or that you're nervous about having sex. You might want to prepare what you're going to say to your partner beforehand - write it down, read it through a few times, or practice saying it in the mirror. It can also be helpful to have some answers prepared for questions they might ask.
- You might want to share with your partner the changes that your body has gone through before initiating sexual activity so you can gauge how you both feel before becoming intimate. It is possible that a new partner may seem shocked by the changes to your body. This does not mean they don't find you attractive or don't want to continue a relationship. Remember that this is new for them too and they may need a little bit of time to feel comfortable.
- If you are uninterested or unable to engage in sexual activity, you can still have romantic feelings, and you and a new partner can focus on showing each other affection by talking, cuddling, kissing, and spending time together. Sex is not the only important piece of a romantic relationship.

**CANCER SUCKS!**

## Conversation prompts:

- "The 3 most important things to know about me: 1) I only love my mom & my bed, I'm sorry. JK, I also love my dog. 2) My favorite color is blue, my favorite song is "Respect," and my favorite food is pizza. 3) I have a type of cancer called \_\_\_\_\_. I was diagnosed 2 years ago. I want to have an honest conversation with you about all of these important things."
- "You may have noticed I'm more tired on some of our dates than others. There's a reason for that. I'm currently undergoing treatment for cancer."
- "I have something important to tell you. I was diagnosed with cancer 8 months ago. My treatment is going well and I want to share that part of my life with you honestly and openly. Do you have any questions right now? If not, we can talk about this another time after you've had a chance to think it over!"
- "Because of my cancer, my sex life looks a little different than before diagnosis. Before we start an intimate relationship, can we have a conversation about what we're both looking for and what feels good to each of us?"
- "I'm nervous about having sex since my treatment. Can we talk about it?"

For Patients:

# INTIMACY AFTER CANCER

HEART  
MIND  
SPIRIT

Once you are in remission, you likely will have a new set of questions and concerns about your sex life. It's important to have a discussion with your doctor about what limitations you may face in your sex life after your treatment is done.

**Don't forget: Pregnancy should be avoided for 6 months after treatment has concluded to prevent fetal abnormalities.**



If you are dealing with physical changes to your sex life, such as vaginal dryness or erectile dysfunction, you can try being intimate with a partner in alternative ways such as kissing, hugging, and spending time together. Additionally, products such as lubricants and sex toys could help. Always talk to your doctor if you have medical concerns or are interested in finding a medicine to alleviate your challenges.

If you are struggling with mental or emotional challenges after your cancer treatment that are impacting your sex life, such as lowered self-confidence or worrying that your cancer will return, try finding a support group or trusted person to talk to, starting a new hobby or learning a new skill, and finding unique ways to accept your new body. As always, it's important to have open and honest conversations with your partner so they can learn how to best support and love you.

## Who needs to know that you've had cancer? Only who you want to tell!

Of course, it's important to be honest with your loved ones, including new partners, but it's ultimately up to you to decide if, how, and when to tell them. If your cancer experience has impacted your sex life, it's important to discuss that with any new partners prior to engaging in sexual activity. Honest communication will ensure you have sexy, respectful, and fun sex with a new partner.

### Here are some conversation prompts to help you break the ice:

- When I was younger, I had cancer. I'd like to discuss how that experience impacts our relationship.
- Before we take the next step in our relationship, I'd like to talk to you about something. I had cancer and it changed my sex life some.
- Having cancer changed my sex life, can we talk about what that means for us?
- While we're having sex, can we prioritize open communication to make sure we're both getting what we need?

## What if I'm Single?

# STRUT YOUR STUFF! DO YOUR THANG! LIVE IT UP! GET YOUR FREAK ON!



# FOR PARTNER OF A PATIENT/ CAREGIVER



If your partner has been diagnosed with cancer, you are also likely going through a whirlwind of change. This is even more extreme if you are acting as a caregiver to your partner. It is important to have open and honest conversations with your partner about how you're both feeling, changes to their body, and how to approach your sex life.



While many aspects of your sex life may be temporarily altered while your partner has cancer, this period of your life can allow you to build a closer relationship with your partner and find increased intimacy as a result.

Many caregivers find that they no longer feel sexual feelings towards their partner while they are battling cancer. Perhaps you view your partner more as a patient than as someone you're sexually attracted to. Or maybe you're scared of hurting your partner during sex. Or maybe you are struggling with feelings of being unwanted or unattractive due to changes in your sex life. Or maybe you're just plain tired from your caretaking responsibilities and trying to keep your lives afloat during this time. These are normal responses to caring for a sick partner, but if you and your partner are interested in rekindling a sexual relationship it is possible through honest communication, patience, and a little bit of creativity to find ways you can excite each other. It's important to remember that even if sex is off the table for you and your partner, there are other ways of creating physical intimacy. Feeling close to your partner can help make the cancer experience more manageable and assist in the recovery process.

Even if you have accepted that your sex life has changed in unexpected ways, it is normal to feel dissatisfied, angry, and sad. It is also normal to feel distressed, out of control, lonely, anxious, and powerless during this time. You may want to seek out a support group for partners and/or caregivers of people with cancer. Having an opportunity to talk to other people in a similar spot as you are in can help normalize your own experiences.

## **My partner is dealing with so many physical and mental changes. How can I help?**

- Encourage open and honest communication with your partner. Share how you are feeling. Ask your partner how they are feeling and what concerns they have.
- Try to maintain a good sense of humor to help ease your way through the hard times.
- Show your partner how much you love them and find them sexually attractive - both through words and touch.

## **My partner and I want to have sex, but it's so challenging now. Any advice?**

- Try reading erotic books together, watching porn, or listening to erotic background music.
- Look online for a new sex toy you both might enjoy
- Increase your intimacy in other ways besides sex - try cuddling, kissing, or manual or oral stimulation.

## **My partner is often too tired for sex. What can I do?**

- Try initiating sexual activity when they're more rested, like right after they wake up in the morning or from a nap.
- Take a more active role during sex to conserve your partner's energy.
- Experiment with other sexual activities that require less energy, like kissing, massaging, and manual stimulation.



# QUESTIONS FOR YOUR DOCTOR

You've probably already asked your doctor a ton of questions and you're going through so many changes right now that it can be easy to forget to also talk to them about your sex life with cancer. But, it's important to talk to your healthcare team about physical and mental changes you may be experiencing and how that impacts your sexual health. Don't hesitate to talk to your doctor about your questions, concerns, or feelings about sex during and after cancer.

Here's a list of questions you may want to ask your doctor:

- Will treatment affect my sex life? Will treatment affect my hormones? If so, how?
- When can I start having sex or masturbating? Are there certain positions I should avoid?
- What physical changes can I expect that will impact my sex life? How can I adjust my sex life to account for those changes? How long should I expect these changes to last?
- What should my partner know about our sex life?
- If I've had a sexually transmitted infection (STI) or disease (STD) in the past, should I be worried about it coming back?
- How will my sex life be different after my cancer treatment is completed?
- How will my fertility be impacted during my treatment? What about after treatment?
- Is there someone I can talk to about physical changes from cancer and treatment that impact my sex life?
- Is there someone I can talk to about mental/emotional changes from cancer and treatment that impact my sex life? Where can I get more information or find a sexuality counselor or sex therapist?
- It hurt when my partner and I had sex. Why? How can we avoid that in the future?
- What kind of birth control should I use during treatment?
- Is there anything else I should do to protect myself or my partner?

## I'm afraid that sex will cause more pain for my partner. Is this true?

- Encourage your partner to talk to their doctor about what sexual activities are appropriate for them.
- Maintain open communication with your partner throughout sexual activity to check in on their comfort and enjoyment.
- To increase comfort, you can try giving your partner a massage, sharing a warm bath or shower to improve muscle relaxation, or a relaxation meditation. Try different positions or use pillows to find the most comfortable positions for you and your partner.
- Talk to your partner about ways to use fantasy as part of your sex life. Focusing attention away from areas of discomfort on their body may increase their enjoyment in sexual activity.

## Is there anything I should be worried about for my own health?

- If your partner is undergoing chemo treatment, the chemo drugs can be excreted through semen and vaginal fluids. If you are engaging in penetrative or oral sex with your partner, it is important to use a barrier method of contraception (i.e. female or male condom) to protect yourself from the chemo drugs. Your partner's doctor will be able to tell you both how long after a chemo treatment it is necessary to worry about exposure to the drugs.
- If your partner has received radioactive seeds in their body (brachytherapy), you could be exposed to radioactivity through sexual activity. Talk to your partner's doctor about when the strongest radiation will have left their body and you can get back to sexual activity.



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