

Sexual Health for Cancer Survivors

There are a number of ways in which cancer treatment can impact your sexual health. Fortunately, there are an abundance of resources to address your concerns. Below are some common ways in which sexuality can be affected by cancer and its treatment.



For Women - most common sexual health concerns

Abrupt menopause triggered by cancer treatment can cause intense vaginal dryness, discomfort, and dyspareunia (painful sexual intercourse). It is also not uncommon for women to experience changes in their sexual response, such as loss of libido or difficulties with arousal.



For Men - the most common sexual health concerns

The most common problem for men is erectile dysfunction, or ED. ED is the consistent inability to obtain and/or maintain an erection sufficient for satisfactory sexual relations

Additional information from the Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center is provided below. Visit their Sexual Health FAQs website for more detail @ <http://www.mskcc.org/cancer-care/survivorship/sexual-health-faqs>

Question: What are the benefits of being sexually active?

The advantages of being sexually active are physical, psychological, emotional, and relational. Endorphins are released when we are sexually active, and these endorphins can elevate our mood and act as de-stressors. In the context of a relationship, being sexually active can help to maintain a couple's connection, which can be very important when one partner has a diagnosis of cancer.

Question: How I can bring up a sexual health question with my clinician?

Sexual health can be a sensitive topic for many patients. However, it is important that you bring up sexual side effects the same as you would any other side effect.

You might ask, “Will there be any sexual side effects from this treatment?” or “What will the long-term effects of treatment (surgery, chemotherapy, radiation) be on my sexual functioning?”

During or after treatment, if you have a particular symptom or concern, the more specific you are with your healthcare provider the better he or she can address the problem. For example, you might say, “I have been experiencing discomfort during intercourse. Is there a way this pain can be relieved?” Or “My sex drive has really diminished since my treatment. Will this get better?”

Sometimes a very simple intervention can be offered by your treating healthcare provider, and sometimes a referral to a specialist may be needed. Sexual health issues are an important part of your quality of life and are absolutely appropriate to discuss with your provider.

Question: Should I come to counseling alone or bring my partner?

We recommend that you make this decision based on several factors: the symptom or concern you have, your desire to include your partner, and your partner's interest in participating. Some couples find that a cancer diagnosis brings them closer together and thus want to come to counseling together. Here at MSKCC, half of our patients come with their partners.