

Female Sexual Health: Practical Pointers During and After Cancer

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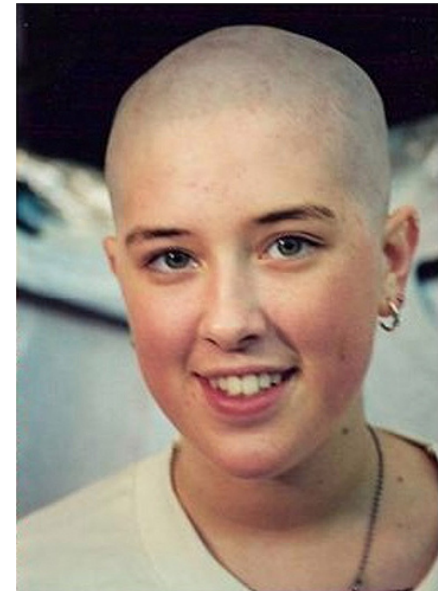
Sex, really? You've got to be kidding!



- Yes, cancer affects how you feel physically, mentally, emotionally and energetically.
- Think you sex life is over because of cancer? Think again!

How cancer treatments affects the body:

- Transplant & Chemotherapy
 - Low blood counts, risk of infection or bleeding
 - Hair loss, skin rashes, changes in skin sensitivity
 - Nausea, decreased appetite, diarrhea, weight changes
 - Changes in “mucosal tissues” such as
 - sores or dryness in the mouth, gut, vagina and rectum
 - Menopausal changes
 - Fatigue
 - GVHD



How cancer treatments affect the body:

- Surgery

Skin changes, lymph system, blood flow, nerve damage or sensitivity, body image

- Radiation

Burns, fibrosis, atrophy, skin sensitivity

- Medications

Menopausal symptoms, fatigue, nausea, constipation



Sex and Sexuality: Two Parts of the Same Idea

- There's **sex**, the activity...
- And **sexuality**, the feeling



Cancer affects sex *and* sexuality – *and not usually in a good way!*

Cancer affects sex

- Skin sensitivity, texture
- Vaginal dryness, atrophy, pain
- Premature menopause
- Fertility concerns
- Weight changes
- Scars and surgical changes
- Bowel and bladder function changes
- Fatigue



Cancer affects sexuality:



- Decreased desire, arousal, orgasm
- Confidence, body image, self esteem
- Feeling 'over touched' but 'under held'
- Role changes (feeling like a 'patient' instead of a 'lover')
- Energy level
- Relationship satisfaction
- Fertility
- Depression, anger worry or anxiety

And it affects partners...

- Role changes
- Fear of causing pain
- Not wanting to be demanding
- Not knowing when or how to bring it up
- Fatigue
- Worry



Practical pointers: what comes first?

- Your BRAIN is your biggest sex organ
- Think it through:
What do you want or need?
What would help?
- Set the ground rules
- Allow *time* to not feel rushed.



- *All of these considerations are the same with a partner or alone!*

What can help? How do I start?

Think about sex:

- Worries, fears
- Wishes and desires
- Remind yourself of times when sex and intimacy were easy and terrific
- Read something sexy
- Put it on the calendar
- Remember: There is no deadline or expectation for what 'success' looks like



Talking about sex helps



- Your partner is not a mind-reader!
- Talk about how you feel – use “I” statements
- Talk about ground rules that help you feel in control, know it is OK to stop
- Share a fantasy, movie or book
- Ask for what you want, need or want to try
- Share what feels good, be willing to demonstrate



Taking the next steps...

- Touch yourself, or guide your partner to touch you, in ways that feel good
 - Move on to more sensual/sexual touching if that feels comfortable
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- Use plenty of lubricant
 - Go slowly, “check in” with what feels good
 - Tears, talking, negotiating and even giggling is allowed
 - Let every time be it’s *own* time –
give yourself permission to try again



Things That Can Help

Lubricants

Water based: Slippery, doesn't stain, washes easily or dries away, can be used with any toys, dilators or condoms, wide variety available.

Oil based: Stays slippery, can be used with any toys or dilators, must be washed off, can stain, not to be used with latex condoms.

Silicone based: Super slippery, can stain, should not be used with silicone toys.



Things that can help

Vaginal Moisturizers

Over-the-counter products that can be used daily, like hand lotion

- Satin
- Yes
- Replens
- New Poise
- Liquidbeads



Things that can help:

Toys and Tools

- Dilators, dildos and fingers
- Vibrators: used internal or external
- Many shapes, sizes and types
- Books and movies
- Clothing that makes you feel sexy
- Express what you'd like in writing if talking is too hard
- Ask for help



Things that can help



Hormones

Estrogen (Rx needed)

- Oral or patch
 - Progesterone if you have a uterus
- Vaginal – cream and ring
- Compounded creams

Supplements

And let's not underestimate the power of exercise and self-care!

Resources: Stores, Websites and more

- **SCCA Survivorship Clinic**
welcomes any cancer survivor who has completed their acute cancer treatment. 206-288-1024
www.seattlecca.org/survivorship
- **Healthcare providers and staff:**
doctors, NP's, PA's, nurses, psychologists, social workers, counselors, chaplains and others are willing to talk to patients, survivors and family members. Some providers are more comfortable than others – ask!
- **Shine:** *A unique cancer specialties store*
www.sccashine.org
- **Babeland:** *Seattle's Adult Toy Store* www.babeland.com
- **SheBop:** A female friendly sex toy boutique in Portland, OR
www.sheboptheshop.com
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- American Cancer Society
www.cancer.org
- www.livestrong.org

Written Material on Cancer and Sexuality

- Woman, Cancer, Sex by Anne Katz
- Intimacy After Cancer: A Woman's Guide by Sally Kydd and Dana Rowett
- Sexuality for the Woman with Cancer by the American Cancer Society
- Making Love Again: Hope for Couples Facing Loss of Sexual Intimacy by Keith Laken
- Sexuality and Fertility After Cancer by Leslie R. Schrorer
- Sexual Intimacy for Women: A Guide for Same-Sex Couples by Glenda Corwin
- Sexy Ever After by Patty Brisben and Keri Peterson, MD
- Healing Sex: A Mind-Body Approach to Healing Sexual Trauma by Staci Haines
- And In Health: A Guide for Couples Facing Cancer Together by Dan Shapiro
- This Should Not Be Happening: Young Adults With Cancer by Anne Katz
- Everything Nobody Tells You About Cancer Treatment and Your Sex Life
<http://kanwa.org/sexual-health/a-z-guide>

Question and Discussion Time!

