

Intimacy, Sexual Functioning and Fertility

Sometimes changes in the way you feel about your body, side effects from treatment, medications or the emotional stress of the cancer experience can lead to sexuality and intimacy problems with your partner. These challenges can include loss of desire, pain during intercourse, erectile dysfunction or the concern about ability to have children. Concerns about these problems are normal and there are things you can do to address both the practical and emotional aspects.

Above all, talk with your health care team about your concerns as they will want to be aware of any problems and may also be able to offer solutions and support. While not everyone on your health care team will have experience with these concerns, you can ask for a referral to a gynecologist or urologist or a counselor who specializes in intimacy, sexuality and/or fertility after cancer. Please know that you are not alone when worrying about the impact of this life-changing experience on your sexual or intimate relationships. It can be hard to talk about these things with others but suffering in silence only serves to make you and your loved one feel more isolated and alone.

When cancer and its treatment interfere with your sexual relationship it can create distress for you and your partner. Following a diagnosis of cancer there can be both physical and emotional changes. Changes in how you feel about your body, fatigue, pain, and depression as well as things like medical appliances (like pumps) or ostomies may make sex and intimacy difficult. These problems can often be managed with solutions that include exercise, medication adjustment, and communication with your partner.

Fertility

If you have been diagnosed with cancer and you are thinking about having children in the future, it is important to discuss preserving fertility – saving and storing eggs or sperm for later use. For some people, radiation, chemotherapy or surgery can impact your ability to have children. This is true for both men and women. If having children in the future is something you are thinking about, talk with your health care team about your options before you begin treatment. An open discussion will help you plan your cancer treatment and know what to expect. Your health care team may refer you to a specialist in preserving fertility. Even if preserving your fertility is not an option, there are other ways that you can explore to start or grow your family. Talk to an expert who can help you with these issues.

National Cancer Institute
(800) 422-6237

www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/coping/life-after-treatment/page5

Fertile Hope/Livestrong
(866) 965-7205

www.LIVESTRONG.org/fertilehope

American Cancer Society
800 237-2345

www.cancer.org