



Sexual Intimacy or Function

Online version with active resource links at: cancer-help.me/sexual

It's common for people to have problems with sex as a result of cancer and its treatment. Sexual problems can last longer than other side effects of cancer treatment. IN spite of this, you can still have an intimate relationship finding new ways to be close if sex is not right at the moment. It's important to seek help in learning how to adapt to these changes. Until then, you and your partner may benefit from other ways to show you care about each other. This can include touching, holding, hugging, and cuddling.

Talking to your loved one and sharing your feelings and concerns is very important. He or she may be afraid to have sex with you. Or your partner may be worried about hurting you or think that you're not feeling well. Even for couples that have been together a long time, it can be hard to stay connected. Let your partner know if you want to have sex or would rather touch, hug, kiss, and cuddle.

Adapted from NIH – NCI: <https://www.cancer.gov/about-cancer/coping/self-image> There is a great deal of information at this website with additional links that are specific to different needs. If you have access to the internet, please look directly at this site as the below is only a summary.

Finding Ways to Be Physically Intimate

- **Erection problems.** Medicine, assistive devices, counseling, surgery, or other approaches.
- **Vaginal dryness.** Ask your health care provider about options such as using a water-based lubricant during sex, applying a vaginal moisturizer to rehydrate the area, using vaginal dilators to increase flexibility and comfort, and/or taking hormones or using a hormone cream are options for you.
- **Muscle weakness.** You can strengthen muscles in your genital area through Kegel exercises. Another alternative is to see a physical therapist who is trained to evaluate patients for pelvic floor issues and can provide pelvic floor physical therapy to address the problem.
- **Talking with a counselor or psychologist.** Some people find that sexual problems related to cancer can affect their self-esteem or start to strain their relationship with their partner. If this is the case, ask your physician, nurse or social worker if you can talk to a therapist. Talking to a professional alone, or with your partner, may help.
- **Seeing a specialist.** A sex therapist may be able to help you talk openly about your problems, work through your concerns, and find new ways to help you and your partner re-establish intimacy.

Feeling Intimate after Treatment

Although cancer treatment may be over, sexual problems may remain for a while.

- Be proud of your body. It got you through treatment!
- Give yourself time to recovery, physically and emotionally.
- Think of things that help you feel more attractive and confident.
- Focus on the positive. Try to be aware of your thoughts, since they can affect your sex life.
- Be open to change. You may find new ways to enjoy intimacy.

Resources for Additional Information:

- [American Cancer Society, Cancer, Sex, and the Female Body](#)
- [American Cancer Society, Sex and the Man With Cancer](#)
- [Cancer.Net, Dating and Intimacy](#)
- [Cancer.Net, Sexuality and Cancer Treatment: Men](#)
- [Cancer.Net, Sexuality and Cancer Treatment: Women](#)
- [NIH, NCI, Self-Image and Sexuality](#)
- [Chemocare, Sexuality and Chemotherapy](#)
- [CancerCare.org, Intimacy During and After Cancer Treatment](#)

Recursos en Español:

- [NIH, Instituto Nacional Del Cáncer, Problemas de salud sexual en mujeres con cáncer](#)
- [NIH, Instituto Nacional Del Cáncer, Problemas de salud sexual en hombres con cáncer](#)
- [Cancer.Net, Sexualidad y tratamiento contra el cáncer: mujeres](#)
- [Cancer.Net, Sexualidad y tratamiento contra el cáncer: hombres](#)
- [Chemocare, Sexualidad](#)
- [American Cancer Society, Cómo el cáncer afecta la sexualidad](#)