

Maintaining Intimacy During Cancer Treatment

Healthcare providers may overlook the intimacy needs of adults with cancer. Discuss your concerns with your doctor or nurse. Though it may be uncomfortable to start the conversation, it will be worth it if you learn about ways to improve your relationship and lessen stress.

Cancer and its treatments can have a big effect on your quality of life. This goes for both people with cancer and their family members, especially their intimate partners. It is important for the partner without cancer to tell the healthcare provider about their sexuality and intimacy concerns as well.

Concerns about intimacy and sexuality while living with cancer are normal

Sexuality and intimacy are important aspects of the quality of your life and cancer may cause dramatic changes to sexuality, sexual functioning, relationships, and your sense of self.

A cancer diagnosis does not necessarily mean you will lose interest in sex. Cancer does not stop sexual feelings any more than it stops hunger and thirst.

It is important to express your feelings and concerns to your healthcare providers. It is normal to have questions and concerns about intimacy. Many people have questions about their sex life during and after treatment, but only a few get the help they need. In a recent study with women who had breast or gynecologic cancers, only 7% asked for advice or medical help for sexuality problems. Yet 42% wanted help and care about sexuality problems.

Ways to Maintain Intimacy with Your Partner

After treatment, some couples report more intimacy, an increase in physical closeness (without sexual intercourse), more appreciation of their spouse, and a stronger relationship.

Intimacy does not have to mean sex; it can mean:

- spending quality time together
- feeling closer (physically and emotionally) to one another
- feeling loved by your partner

Try to look at this as an opportunity to try new things and find out how you and your partner can find pleasure and intimacy together.

Tips to Increase Intimacy

- Give and receive good, long hugs every day.
- Hold hands.
- Give each other massages.
- Spend quality alone time together, and talk about things beside cancer.
- Have open, honest discussions about both of your concerns.
- If you are embarrassed about showing a body part or scar, find different ways to cover them up. Try different positions that make you more comfortable.

Additional Resources

Roswell Park

- Department of Social Work: **716-845-8022**
- Pastoral Care: **716-845-8051 or 716-845-8852**
- **The11 Day Power Play Cancer Resource Center** **Phone: 716-845-8659**
Welcoming staff to assist you with reliable, current information and resources.
Hours: Mon -Fri 8 a.m. – 4 p.m.
Location: Hospital - first floor
- **Roswell Park Online Community** <https://community.roswellpark.org>

National/International

- Oncolink: www.oncolink.org
 - [Women's Guide to Sexuality During and After Cancer Treatment](#)
 - [Men's Guide to Sexuality During & After Cancer Treatment](#)
- American Cancer Society (ACS) <http://www.cancer.org>
- Canadian Cancer Society (CCS) www.cancer.ca