

Sexual Health and Cancer

Sexuality is an important and normal part of life. Cancer does not take this away. It is important to talk to your healthcare team about any questions, concerns, behaviors or risks you may have.

Q: Can I still have sex during cancer treatment?

A: Yes. However, there are several important things for you to know. There may be times when your blood counts are low and having sex may put you at risk for infection and bleeding. Your care team can talk to you more about when you may be most at risk and how to best protect yourself. Using lubrication can help to lower the risk of bleeding from sex when your blood counts are low. Using a barrier, such as a condom, can help to lower the risk of infection. During treatment, it is possible for chemotherapy to pass into the fluid inside the vagina or into semen. Because of this, it is best to wait for at least 48 to 72 hours after you have had chemotherapy to have sex, in order to protect your partner from exposure.

Q: If I have sex, could my partner get cancer from me?

A: Fortunately, cancer is not a contagious disease, so your partner can't catch cancer from being in close contact, touching, hugging, kissing or having sex with you.

Q: Is birth control safe during treatment?

A: This will depend on your cancer and cancer treatment, as well as the type of birth control you use. Your care team can help you decide what birth control is best for you. *Remember, not all birth control methods protect against sexually transmitted infections, so you will still want to use additional barrier protection, like condoms, if you are going to have sex with a partner.* You may want to talk to your doctor about long-term reversible contraception options.



Q: Can I get pregnant or get someone pregnant if I am on treatment?

A: Unfortunately, being pregnant when you have cancer can be dangerous for both the pregnant woman and the baby. It is very important to prevent pregnancy by using protection (condoms and another form of birth control) if you have sex during treatment. While some types of cancer treatment can affect fertility (the ability to have children), it is possible for a woman to get pregnant during and after cancer therapy (even if she stopped having her period). It is also possible for a man receiving cancer treatment or who has finished treatment to get a female partner pregnant.

Q: Why does my doctor need to know about my sex life?

A: Your care team's job is to help you be as healthy as possible during treatment as well as to provide you with information about any risks to your health, including risks to your sexual health. Sexuality is a very normal and important part of life for an adolescent or young adult, whether or not you are having sex, and it is important for you to be able to talk to your care team about any questions or concerns you may have about your sexual health.

Q: If I have a central line, g-tube or other implanted device, can I still be intimate with another person?

A: Yes, you can still be intimate with another person even if you have medical devices. However, it is important to take care of your central line, g-tube, or other medical devices as instructed. Ask a member of your care team if you have any questions.

Q: Will cancer change my sexual function?

A: Cancer and treatment can affect sexual function. For men and women, this can include decreased sexual desire (libido), and low overall energy. Women may experience vaginal dryness, which can cause discomfort during intimacy. Men may experience erectile dysfunction or difficulty ejaculating. If you experience any of these symptoms, talk with your medical care team. **There are options** to help with these symptoms.

* **Confidentiality** - Talking with your doctor and care team is confidential. No information will be shared with your family and friends unless you give us permission. The exception to this is if we are ordered to by a court or it is necessary to prevent serious, foreseeable, and imminent harm to a patient or others (for example, child abuse or suicide).