

Sex after Breast Cancer

Understanding Changes:

Breast cancer and its treatments can bring about physical and emotional changes that can have a significant impact on a woman's sexuality and intimate relationships. Sexual problems are common among breast cancer survivors, affecting over 70% of women.

Some common changes include:

- Loss of sensation in the breasts or nipples
- Changes in libido (sex drive)
- Vaginal dryness
- Pain during intercourse
- Difficulty achieving orgasm
- Body image issues

The physical and emotional impacts of breast cancer treatment, such as surgery, chemotherapy, radiation, and hormone therapy, can contribute to sexual dysfunction. Factors like early menopause, fatigue, anxiety, and changes in body image can negatively affect sexual desire

Communication with Your Partner:

Effective communication with your partner is essential for maintaining a satisfying and healthy sex life after a breast cancer diagnosis. Here are some tips to foster open and supportive dialogue:

- **Be Open and Honest:** Share your feelings and concerns openly. This honesty will help your partner understand what you're going through and how they can best support you.
- **Discuss Physical Changes:** Talk about any physical changes or discomfort you may be experiencing. It's important to address these issues so that both you and your partner can adjust and find new ways to enjoy intimacy.
- **Adapt Together:** Understand that your sexual relationship might need to change. What worked before may not work now, and that's okay. Explore new ways of being intimate that are comfortable and pleasurable for both of you.
- **Express Needs and Boundaries:** Clearly express your needs and boundaries. Let your partner know what feels good and what doesn't. Encourage them to do the same.
- **Be Patient:** Healing and adjusting to changes take time. Be patient with yourself and your partner as you navigate this new chapter in your relationship.

- **Seek Professional Help:** If communicating about sex feels challenging, consider seeking help from a therapist or counselor who specializes in sexual health or cancer survivorship. They can provide valuable guidance and support.

Tips for Sexual Wellness:

- **Take it slow:** Be patient with yourself and your partner as you navigate the changes in your mind and body after cancer. It's OK to start slowly, and gradually explore intimacy at a pace that you feel comfortable with.
- **Experiment:** Explore different positions, techniques, and forms of intimacy to find what feels comfortable and pleasurable for you and your partner.
- **Use lubrication:** If you engage in vaginal penetration during intimacy and experience vaginal dryness, try using a water-based lubricant to help enhance comfort during sexual activity.
- **Managing fatigue:** Prioritize rest and self-care to manage fatigue. Consider scheduling intimate moments when you're feeling more energized.
- **Seek support:** Don't hesitate to seek support from a healthcare professional, counselor, or support group if you're struggling with intimacy or emotional concerns.

Maintaining Emotional Wellness:

Maintaining your emotional wellness is crucial for a fulfilling sex life after a breast cancer diagnosis. Here are some key strategies to help you take care of your emotional health in this context:

Practice Self-Care

- **Prioritize Rest and Relaxation:** Ensure you get enough sleep and take time to relax. Feeling well-rested can improve your overall mood and make you more open to intimacy.
- **Stay Physically Active:** Exercise can boost your mood and energy levels, which can positively impact your sex life. Choose activities you enjoy and are comfortable with, such as walking, yoga, or gentle stretching.
- **Eat Nutritious Foods:** A balanced diet can enhance your overall well-being, contributing to a better mood and increased energy for intimate moments.
- **Engage in Hobbies:** Engaging in activities you love can reduce stress and make you feel more confident and relaxed, which can improve your sexual well-being.
- **Mindfulness and Relaxation Techniques:** Practices such as meditation, deep breathing exercises, and mindfulness can help reduce anxiety, making you feel more at ease and connected with your partner.

Connect with Others

- **Talk to Loved Ones:** Sharing your thoughts and feelings about intimacy with your partner can help you both understand each other's needs and desires. Open communication is key to maintaining a healthy sex life.
- **Join Support Groups:** Connecting with others who are facing similar challenges can provide valuable insights and support. Support groups offer a safe space to discuss intimate issues, share experiences, and receive encouragement.
- **Stay Socially Active:** Maintaining social connections can improve your overall mood and reduce feelings of isolation, which can positively impact your sexual health. Engage in social activities that make you feel good about yourself.

Resources:

Books:

- [Return to Sex & Intimacy: For Cancer Survivors and Their Partners](#) - by Michael J. Russer and Jacqueline V. Lopez
- [Sex and Cancer: Intimacy, Romance, and Love after Diagnosis and Treatment](#) - by Saketh R. Guntupalli and Maryann Karinch
- [Sex Matters for Women: A Complete Guide to Taking Care of Your Sexual Self Second Edition](#) - by Sallie Foley and Sally A. Kope
- [Woman Cancer Sex 1st Edition](#) - by Anne Katz

Websites:

- [Sex and the Adult Female with Cancer](#) - American Cancer Society Guide
- [Sexuality, Intimacy & Cancer](#) - Cancer Council NSW

Podcasts:

- [Talking To A Partner About Sex After Breast Cancer](#) - Breastcancer.org
- [Young Adult Survivorship: Fertility, Sexuality and Intimacy](#) - CancerCare

Videos:

- [Reflections: Body Image After a Breast Cancer Diagnosis](#) YouTube video by Living Beyond Breast Cancer