



Well Beyond *Cancer*



Sexuality & Intimacy During Cancer Treatment

Sexuality is at the heart of our being. While sex is the act of sexual intercourse, sexuality is the way we feel. It involves our needs — physical, psychological, social, spiritual and emotional. These are needs for comfort, touch, closeness and pleasure. These needs can be fulfilled with intimacy and our own feelings of sexuality.

After being diagnosed with cancer, how you see yourself as a sexual being may change. A cancer diagnosis impacts one's quality of life, and one's sexuality is influenced by:

- » Fatigue
- » Anxiety
- » Disinterest in the act of sex
- » Concern over physical changes
- » Pain or discomfort
- » Loss of sensation

Coping with changes in sexuality starts with open communication with your partner and health care team. Discuss with them how you are feeling. What expectations do you have of yourself and your partner?

During or after your treatment, you may find that your quality of life may change. You may not feel like you have enough energy for the act of sexual intercourse, but using these strategies may fulfill the intimacy needs of you and your partner:

- » Set aside some quality time together to do things that are important to each of you.
- » Hold hands, hug and snuggle.
- » Remind your partner of your love with written notes or messages.
- » Massage each other.
- » Find ways to laugh together.
- » Stay active. Exercise or yoga will help with fatigue.
- » Surround yourself with positive people.
- » Give yourself positive affirmations.





FOR MORE INFORMATION about sexuality and intimacy during cancer treatment, these resources can help:

Leukemia and Lymphoma Society

Sexuality and Intimacy

lls.org/managing-your-cancer/sexuality-and-intimacy

American Cancer Society

Look Good Feel Better Program

lookgoodfeelbetter.org

If you have any questions about sexuality during cancer treatment, Nancy Corbitt, BSN, RN, OCN, CRNI, senior clinical nurse at UMGCCC, is a good resource. Email her at ncorbitt@umm.edu.

If you are feeling up to it, it is safe to have sexual intercourse during cancer treatment. However, you and your partner must take some precautions:

- » Condoms and dental dams are necessary if and when you are undergoing chemotherapy. That is because chemotherapy involves hazardous medications that can be present in your bodily fluids for 48 hours after receiving the medications. Both you and your partner need to be protected from exposure to your bodily fluids.
- » If using lubrication, make sure it is water-based for both male and female.
- » Birth control is necessary during treatment and post-transplant. Ask your oncologist how long you will need to avoid pregnancy.

- » If your white blood cell count or your platelet count is low, abstinence is best. For further details, please talk with your healthcare team. We can provide some parameters about how high these counts should be for sex.
- » Do not use erectile-enhancing medications unless approved by your provider.
- » If needed, use medications such as anti-nausea or pain relievers before sexual activity.
- » Practice good hygiene, and urinate after sex.



Visit umm.edu/SexAndCancer to watch a video on this topic.



For more information about Survivorship Services:
410-328-7609 | umgccc.org/survivorship