

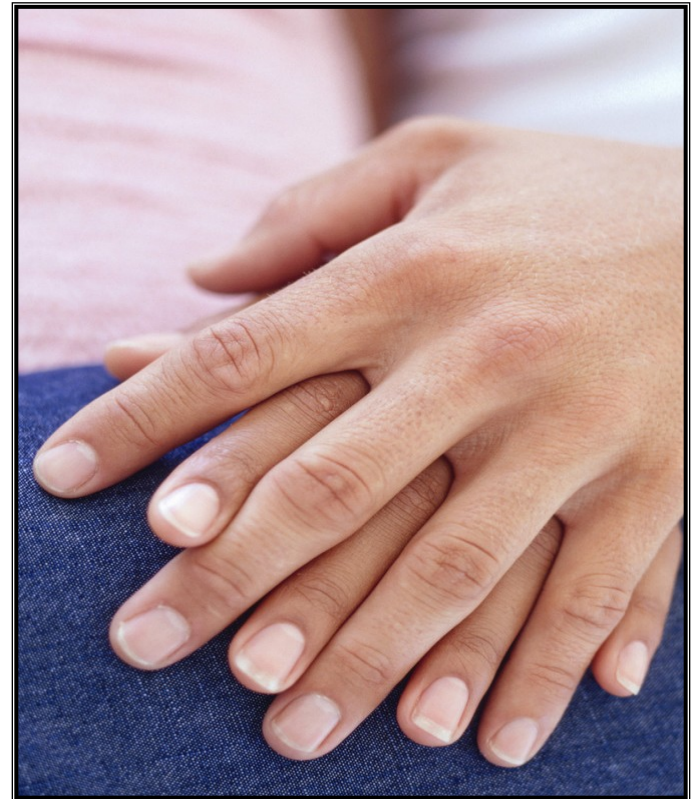
Resources

www.cancer.ca
1-888-939-3333

www.cancerbackup.org
(type in sexuality)

www.cancer.org
(type in sexuality)

Cancer and Sexuality



Coping with Changes and Challenges

Cancer and Sexuality

Living with a cancer diagnosis or its treatment can change how you see yourself and may affect relationships in your life. For an individual or intimate partner this can often include issues related to body image, feeling connected and sexual expression.

Taking the time to think about how you see yourself as a sexual being and sharing openly and directly with others can be helpful. This can re-establish closeness and is important to living well with a serious illness.



This brochure can help support you and your partner by:

- Showing some ways that cancer can affect individual sexuality and intimate relationships
- Offer ideas to assist with discussions about feelings, fears and desires
- Provide a list of helpful resources where you can find more information

Both the emotional impact of cancer and the possible side effects of treatment (surgery, chemotherapy, hormone therapy or radiation) can be difficult and may affect your sexuality. You or your partner may be dealing with:

- Surgical scars (which may be painful or numb during healing)
- Weight gain or loss
- Hair loss
- Depression and anxiety
- Fatigue
- Loss of body parts (e.g. loss of a breast or ovaries, penis or testicles, colostomy)
- Pain or tenderness
- Problems in getting or keeping an erection
- Menopausal symptoms (hot flashes, vaginal dryness, mood swings)

- Loss of bladder or bowel control
- Less arousal or less interest in making love
- Problems with orgasm
- Sterility or infertility

These changes and how you feel about them and yourself are important to think about and share with your partner or your health care team. Together you can find what works best.

For couples facing changes or problems in their sexuality or sexual relationship it can seem easier to avoid dealing with them. Openness, honesty and understanding at this time can go a long way to get back your sense of self or of being a couple. Give yourself time and patience to do this. Here are some ideas to building the bridge between you and your partner.

Plan a time to be together privately. Let your partner know how you are feeling physically, mentally, emotionally and sexually. Use “I” statements to reduce the risk of your partner feeling defensive about what you say:

“Since cancer came into our lives...
“I notice that...I feel...I wonder if...”

Think back together on the different stages of your relationship. Did your level of desire and sexual relationship change (e.g. with pregnancy, health problems)? Talk about how you have coped with the various changes in your lives together.

Understand that even non-sexual touching can feel like too much at a time when you may feel ‘touched out’ by medical professionals and procedures. Listen to each other’s needs and choices. Take time to find a comfortable level of physical intimacy. Talk to your health care team about any medications, devices or other aids. Set aside time for each other on a regular basis (e.g. date night) where you spend time together away from the demands of cancer.

Talk with your health care team if either of you would like help and support.