



Intimacy and Illness: Cancer

What is cancer?

Cancer develops when cells in the body experience an excessive growth and mutation. This can result in tumors or in diseases of the blood. There are many different kinds of cancer and it can affect all areas of the body.

Who gets cancer?

Anyone can get cancer; however, there are some cancers that only affect men or women. For example, prostate cancer only affects men, and ovarian cancer only affects women.

What causes cancer?

Cancer is caused by cells that mutate and grow out of control. Many different things can cause this, including genetic predispositions, lifestyle factors, environmental factors, and family history. Approximately 10% of cancers are caused by genetic conditions.

How can I prevent cancer?

The easiest way to prevent cancer is to avoid proven carcinogens, such as tobacco, environmental factors, the sun, and others. Exercising regularly and eating a well-balanced diet, including lots of fruits and vegetables, can also help prevent cancer. Using a condom during all sexual encounters can help prevent some types of cancer as well.

Can cancer affect my sexuality?

Yes, cancer can affect a person's sexuality in a number of ways. Some people find that they have no interest in sexual activity because their main concern is survival. During treatment, people may find that worry, depression, pain, or fatigue can affect their sexual desire.

The kinds of side effects experienced by people will vary depending on the type and location of the cancer. Men and women sometimes experience different sexual side effects, including:

WOMEN

- Difficulty reaching orgasm
- Decreased vaginal lubrication
- Pain during sexual activity
- Loss of libido/sexual desire
- Hot flashes

MEN

- Difficulty getting and maintaining an erection
- Premature ejaculation
- Loss of libido/sexual desire
- Pain during sex
- Dry orgasm (with no ejaculation)

How can I improve my sexuality?

It may be necessary to re-evaluate your definition of sexuality and intimacy. Being intimate does not necessarily mean being sexual; it could be something as basic as holding hands or cuddling. Keep an open mind about new sexual experiences and stimulations; what worked before cancer may not have the same effect after cancer. Try new forms of touching and in different places of the body. Experiment with different times of the day for intimacy and try new styles and techniques.





It is important to communicate with your partner and your health care provider about any sexual side effects you are experiencing. Your partner can be there to support you along the way, and your health care provider can create a plan to help counter the sexual side effects of cancer and its treatment.

There are easy activities that couples can do to help maintain and improve their intimacy. Below is an example of how a couple can reconnect.

Simple Pleasures

- Step 1:** You and your partner can write down all the small things that the other person does to make you feel loved (ie: holding your hand, kissing you before leaving for work, etc).
- Step 2:** Add things to the list that your partner did at the beginning of the relationship that brought you pleasure.
- Step 3:** Add three small things that you wish your partner did more often, or once in a while.
- Step 4:** Rank the behaviors by how much pleasure they give you.
- Step 5:** Exchange lists and without discussing it, try to do some of the things on your partner's list.

What products does Pure Romance offer to help improve my sexuality?

If you find that you have a decreased libido or have a more difficult time reaching orgasm than before, you may want to try an arousal cream, such as Ex-T-Cee, Nympho Niagra, or X-Scream (which can be used by both men and women). It is also important to use a water-based vaginal lubricant each time you engage in sexual activity, which can help with vaginal dryness. Try Just Like Me or Sweet Seduction, which are both gentle and non-irritating. If you find that a water-based lubricant is not enough to help with vaginal dryness, try a vaginal moisturizer, such as Fresh Start, which is estrogen-free and very gentle.

For men experiencing erectile dysfunction, a c-ring, such as Jelly Tool Belt, can be worn during intercourse and will help men acquire and maintain an erection. (It is highly recommended to use a thick, creamy lubricant, such as Whipped, when using a c-ring.)

You can also get other product recommendations from your Pure Romance Consultant or by visiting our Web site. You can also visit the Web site for Sensuality, Sexuality, Survival, Pure Romance's cancer outreach program (www.pureromance.com/sss). This site provides a great deal of information about cancer and sexuality, as well as details about Pure Romance's Pink Ribbon line of products.

