

Testicular Cancer: Coping with Effects on Sexuality



Treatment for testicular cancer can lead to changes in your sexual function and fertility. Treatment can also change how your body looks and feels. Talk with your healthcare provider if you have any concerns about how cancer or its treatment can affect your sex life. There are often ways to help prepare for and cope with treatment-related changes.

Whether these changes are short-term or long-lasting, you can find ways to feel good about yourself and to be intimate with your partner.

Keep in mind that:

- Your partner is also affected by your cancer. It's normal to feel sad, frustrated, or angry. It's also normal to mourn the losses that testicular cancer may bring, such as your ability to get your partner pregnant naturally. Talk about both your feelings and fears. Not talking about these feelings and emotions can get in the way of being intimate.
- Clear communication with your partner and healthcare provider is key to feeling good about sexual intimacy even with the changes cancer may cause.
- It's normal to lose the desire for sex for a while during and after cancer treatment.
- Cancer isn't contagious. You can't give it to your partner.
- Being intimate won't cause the cancer to come back or grow.

To help enjoy sex during and after cancer treatment:

- Ask your provider what you should expect. Having one or both testicles removed affects the way you look. But it can also affect your testosterone levels and your sperm counts. It helps to be prepared for these changes so you can make plans to manage them.
- Include your partner in discussions and decisions. This way you both know what to expect.
- Be patient and give yourself time.
- Talk with your healthcare provider about staying sexually active or resuming sexual activity. There may be safety steps you should take. For instance, you may need to use a condom to protect your partner from chemotherapy medicine in your semen for a few days after treatment.
- Focus on your physical recovery. This includes diet, rest, and physical activity.
- Choose a time when you and your partner are relaxed, rested, and free from distractions.
- Create a romantic mood. Be creative.
- Try different positions until you find one that's comfortable for you and your partner.
- Use pain medicines, if needed.
- Keep an open mind about learning new ways to have sexual pleasure for you and your partner.
- Explore different ways of expressing love. This might be hugging and holding, stroking and caressing, or talking.
- Find humor where you can.
- Consider couples counseling to help you and your partner better communicate and work through changes in your sex life.

If you think you might want the option of having a child at some point after cancer treatment:

- Talk with your healthcare providers about this before starting treatment.
- You may have to bring up the subject if your provider doesn't. Talk about what's important to you. Share your fears or concerns.
- Your cancer care team can talk with you about your options. They can also refer you to reproductive specialists.

Sexuality is an important part of life, and it can be changed by testicular cancer. These changes may range from the loss of a testicle, to infertility, to erectile dysfunction. Again, your healthcare provider is the best person to help you know what to expect based on your treatment plan. They can also work with you to manage cancer-related changes. Some of the things that might help include:

- Prosthetic testicular implants. These implants look and feel like a normal testicle in the scrotum.
- Sperm banking before treatment. Collecting and freezing sperm before treatment is one way to help make sure you can have a child someday.
- Testosterone gel, patches, or shots. These can help keep your hormone levels normal even if both testicles have been removed.

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