

Sexuality

Just the Facts

Treatments and medications received during transplant cause physical changes and emotional changes that can affect sexuality and reproduction potential. Physically, for women the amount of moisture that the vagina produces is reduced. This may make intercourse uncomfortable. For men, chemotherapy can sometimes affect sexual desire and erections. Both men and women often lose interest in sex during treatment, at least for a time. This is quite normal. Few people can keep their desire for sex when they feel that life itself is threatened. Lastly, concerns about attractiveness (hair loss, weight loss/gain, catheters) can change sexual responsiveness.

Your Goals:

Strive for good communication with your partner and with your doctor or nurse.

- ✓ Prevent pain during sexual activity.
- ✓ Prevent infection.
- ✓ Keep an open mind about ways to feel sexual pleasure.
- ✓ Get professional help when needed.

Important Signs and Symptoms:

Report symptoms to doctor or nurse during clinic hours today.

- ☐ Women: dry vagina, discharge from the vagina, hot flashes, pain, discomfort or bleeding after or during intercourse.
- ☐ Men: genital pain, pain during ejaculation.
- ☐ Fearfulness about sexual activity.

What You Can Do At Home:

Strive for good communication with your partner and with your doctor.

- ➡ Ask questions. Although you may feel reluctant, try to be open and ask the doctor or nurse about sexual activity.
- ➡ Always let your doctor or nurse know about pain during sexual activity. Medical treatments can often be helpful. Do not let embarrassment get in the way of your medical care.

Prevent pain during intercourse.

- ➡ Plan sexual activity for the time of day when you are feeling the best. If you are taking pain medication, take it at an hour when it will be in full effect during sex.
- ➡ Find a position for touching or intercourse that puts as little pressure as possible on the sensitive or painful areas of your body.
- ➡ Empty the bladder before intercourse or before touching. Feelings of fullness can interfere with feelings of sexual relaxation and pleasure.
- ➡ Let your partner know if any kinds of touching cause pain. Show your partner ways to caress or positions that aren't painful.



➡ Women:

- Use a water-soluble, bacteriostatic lubricating gel on the external genitalia for pleasuring, and in the vagina and on your partner for ease of penetration.
- Make sure you feel adequately aroused before you start intercourse. When you are aroused the vagina expands to its fullest length and width.
- Learn to relax vaginal muscles during intercourse. Kegels help you learn to relax these muscles. Ask for instruction if you haven't learned these exercises before.

Prevent infection.

- ➡ Wash hands before and after sexual activity.
- ➡ Urinate after sex. This rinses out bacteria that may cause infection in the urinary tract.
- ➡ Avoid sexual contact with people who have infectious diseases (colds, flu, cold sores) or sexually transmitted diseases.

Cope creatively with changes in appearance.

- ➡ Focus on the positive. Positive thoughts can make a sexual experience good.
- ➡ Create a “healthy illusion” --disguising the changes treatment has made and drawing attention to your best points.
- ➡ Consider wearing a wig, scarf, turban or hat. Discuss with your partner how you both feel about wearing a wig or head covering during lovemaking. There is no right or wrong decision.
- ➡ Contact your local American Cancer Society or call 1-800-395-LOOK for information on the Look Good . . . Feel Better program.

Keep an open mind about ways to feel sexual pleasure.

- ➡ Learn new ways to give and receive sexual pleasure. There may be times when intercourse is not possible. Help each other reach orgasm through touching and stroking. At times, just cuddling, being physically close, can be pleasure enough.
- ➡ Enjoy self-stimulation.
- ➡ No matter what kind of treatment you have had, the ability to feel pleasure from touching almost always remains.

Call for professional help when needed.

- ➡ Women: If you notice signs of premature menopause (hot flashes, irritability, headaches, vaginal dryness, less interest in sex) talk with your doctor. You may benefit from hormone replacement therapy (HRT) or a change in the dose or type of HRT you are using.
- ➡ Men: If you experience loss of sexual desire, erection problems, trouble reaching orgasm, premature ejaculation, or pain, talk with your doctor. Your doctor will work with you to determine the cause (physical, hormone changes, or anxiety) and get you started on a therapeutic plan.