

Sexuality, intimacy and breast cancer

Any serious illness can cause issues in a relationship. Sex and intimacy with someone can be difficult after a breast cancer diagnosis. You may feel your body has let you down. You may not feel the same pleasure as before. You may develop some body image issues that may also affect how you view sex and your own sexuality. This is normal.

How to talk with your partner

After breast cancer, talking with your partner about sex may be hard. When you feel comfortable, choose a moment when you are alone and relaxed to talk. Give yourself and your partner permission to talk about your feelings, both good and bad. Above all else, be honest. Talking to each other about your fears allows you to reassure each other. You may want to talk about:

- **Your biggest fears** — You may fear your partner will reject or leave you. You may worry your partner finds you less attractive. Most women, and their partners, will need time to grieve the loss of their breast(s).
- **Your partner's fears** — Your partner may fear physically hurting you during sex. Partners may be confused or unsure of the best way to show support and affection. They may withdraw or wait for signs from you about when to resume an intimate or sexual relationship.
- **Your “new” sex life** — Breast cancer may change what you like to do and how you like to be touched during sex. You may not want to have sex for a while; this is normal. But your partner may not know this unless you talk about it. You may find your partner is willing to do whatever will make you happy.



Why don't you...

Get romantic

Bring some romance back into your life. Plan a candle-light dinner. Take a bubble bath. Take time to nurture your relationship.

Go slow

Don't feel you need to have sex. There are other things you can do that provide pleasure, such as kissing and touching.

Exercise

For breast cancer survivors, exercise can help improve sexuality as well as help improve body image, reduce anxiety and depression.

Do something different

Change your routine. Try new things. Have fun.

Join a support group

Consider joining a support group. You can join with your partner or by yourself. This may help you cope with all the changes in your body and self-image. Some women find these changes difficult. Others find strength in their new image of themselves.

Get counseling

There is a special type of counseling called cognitive behavioral therapy that uses relaxation techniques. Research suggests this may improve sexuality for breast cancer survivors. It may also help breast cancer survivors reduce fatigue and stress.



A note about birth control

It is important to talk to your partner about birth control. Pregnancy should be avoided while you are undergoing some breast cancer treatments, as some can cause birth defects.

You are not alone

If you are struggling, you are not alone. Sex and intimacy can be difficult for women after a breast cancer diagnosis. It helps to address these issues early so you can find solutions. Share this information with your partner. Getting the support you need should not be your responsibility alone.



Treat side effects and menopausal symptoms

Sex may be painful now. Some breast cancer treatments lead to vaginal dryness, discomfort, pain and menopausal symptoms such as hot flashes and night sweats. There are some prescription and non-prescription products and medications that may help. Vaginal moisturizers are available over the counter. Talk with your doctor about your options and the correct way to use the products and medications recommended for you.

Resources

Susan G. Komen®
1-877 GO KOMEN (1-877-465-6636)
www.komen.org

American Association of Sexuality Educators, Counselors
and Therapists (AASECT)
202-449-1099
www.aasect.org

Related educational resources:

- [Support After A Breast Cancer Diagnosis](#)
- [Talking With Your Partner](#)
- [What's Happening to Me?](#)