

Sexuality, intimacy and breast cancer

Any serious illness can cause issues in a relationship. Sex and intimacy 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 you did before. Body image issues may also affect how you view sex and your own sexuality. Anxiety and depression may also impact your sexuality. This is normal.

How to talk with your partner

After a breast cancer diagnosis, talking with your partner about sex may be hard. When you feel comfortable, choose a moment when you're alone and relaxed. 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 worry your partner finds you less attractive or may even leave you. Most women who have mastectomy (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. 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.

You may want to:

Exercise

For women who've had breast cancer, exercise can help improve sexuality. It can also help improve body image, reduce anxiety and depression.



Find a counselor

Cognitive behavioral therapy is a type of counseling that may use relaxation techniques. Research shows it may improve sexual desire and reduce discomfort during sex in women who've had breast cancer. It may also help reduce fatigue and stress.

Increase romance

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.

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 the changes in your body and your self-image. Some women find these changes difficult. Others find strength in their new image of themselves.

SEXUALITY AND INTIMACY

After a Breast Cancer Diagnosis

Resources to find a specialist trained in sexual health concerns for people who've had cancer

Susan G. Komen®

1-877 GO KOMEN
(1-877-465-6636)

komen.org

American Association of Sexuality Educators, Counselors and Therapists (AASECT)

202-449-1099

aasect.org

International Society for the Study of Women's Sexual Health

952-683-9025

isswsh.org

Related online resources:

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

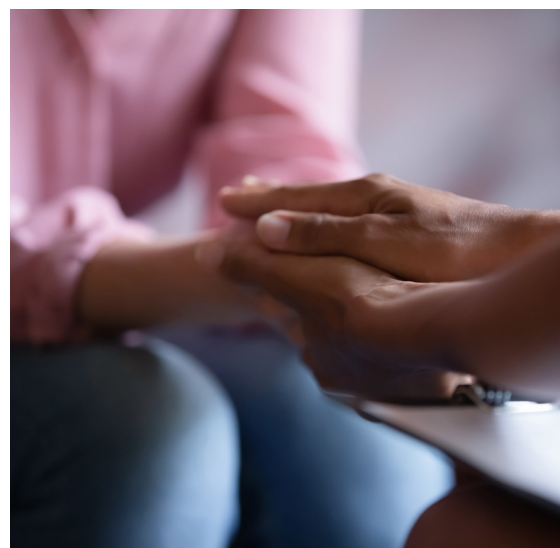
Treat side effects and menopausal symptoms

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.



A note about birth control

It's important to talk with your partner about birth control. Pregnancy should be avoided while you're undergoing breast cancer treatments, such as tamoxifen, which can cause birth defects.



You're not alone

If you're struggling, you're not alone. Sex and intimacy can be difficult after a breast cancer diagnosis. Problems can increase over time, so it's important to address these issues early. Talk with your partner and get the support you need.

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