



Patient Questions to Ask

It's common for people to have problems with sex because of cancer and its treatment. Sexual problems are often caused by changes to your body, as a result from chemotherapy, radiation, surgery, hormone therapy, or certain medicines. Emotional concerns including anxiety, depression, and worry can also interrupt normal sexual functioning. Depending on your specific cancer treatment, you may have short-term or long-term problems with sex after treatment.

Your medical team will give you a list of possible side effects related to your specific cancer treatment, including short and long term sexual side effects. Before, during and after treatment, a member of your medical team will check in with you to screen for any issues, via a distress tool survey, questionnaire, or in person interview.

As you may have found, sometimes physicians, nurses, and other medical professionals hesitate to talk openly about what you may expect regarding sexual dysfunction in the weeks and months following your cancer treatment.

If your medical provider has not discussed sexual side effects with you, and you would like to have a conversation with them, the following questions are examples of what can be asked to initiate that discussion. Though it can feel awkward initiating a discussion about sex in a medical setting, knowing the side effects your specific treatment can cause will help you mentally and physically prepare for it. There may be rehabilitative exercises that can be started early to lessen the severity of the long term effects. Part of your preparation may be to discuss expectations with your partner so both of you can plan together.

1. I'm concerned about the possible side effects that involve intimacy issues? Are you the correct person to talk to about this, or can you recommend a specialist who deals with these issues?
2. How will my cancer treatment or my medications affect my love life?
3. What are the possible side effects of my treatment that will interfere with my marital relationship?
4. How long before I can resume sexual activity? Will there be permanent changes I need to prepare for?
5. What are the long term side effects, related to menopause, I can expect after my treatment?
6. What have other patients stated as the short and long term sexual side effects from this type of treatment?
7. What can my spouse expect from my long-term side effects related to intimacy?
8. Will the sexual side effects expected from my treatment be short term? Is there anything I could be doing or taking now to lessen the severity of the symptoms?

9. Will my cancer treatment interfere with penetration to the vagina?
10. If the cancer treatment causes sexual dysfunction, are there things I can do to lessen the severity of the symptoms?
11. I'm not in a committed relationship, but are there side effects from treatment that will make intimacy difficult for me in the future?
12. Having an Intimate relationship with my partner has gotten more and more difficult since surgery. Who do you recommend I talk to regarding this?
13. I'm having symptoms of menopause since treatment. Can you treat those symptoms, or who can you refer me to?
14. Intercourse is painful. Is there anything I can take to make that better?
15. Can you recommend someone I can talk with to address the sexual issues I'm experiencing?