# **One man’s story about the changes in his relationship with his wife after the diagnosis and treatment of prostate cancer**

A cancer diagnosis is life changing. It touches every part of your life, especially your relationship with your partner.

James, a 62-year-old businessman, had prostate cancer and was treated with hormones and radiation therapy for over a year. He was warned that his treatment could impact his sexual health and that side effects should be minimized because it was caught early. He stated, “There was really nothing I wish I had been told [about side effects or treatment], as I received the best treatment from the best doctors in the world. They were very realistic and thorough.” He did lose the ability to maintain an erection temporarily, and the fatigue from treatment prevented them from having sex. Thankfully, James had providers who took the time to discuss the sexual health side effects of cancer treatment, so his side effects were not a shock to him.

Intimacy with his wife, Sarah, 70, was impacted by his diagnosis and treatment. “I think psychologically Sarah acted as if cancer was contagious. When I was diagnosed, and I still had sexual desire, she was apprehensive, as if it was like an STD. She was afraid to have sex or touch me, probably from the psychology of it all. Cancer was a death sentence in the past, but not today.” Despite this reaction, James was supported by Sarah, and he didn’t feel alone. They made sure to talk about how the cancer diagnosis made them feel, how it affected their sex life, and what their desires for intimacy were. They made sure to communicate and come to a mutual agreement that worked for their relationship. As James put it, “Any healthy relationship will evolve beyond sex or disruption.”

While they “fool around” on rare occasions, he states it isn’t a big priority or desire at their age. He and his wife Sarah maintained open communication throughout treatment, and Sarah understood the effects on sexual function. James said that not touching, his loss of erection, and vaginal atrophy from lack of sex did affect their relationship, but through communication and discussion, they realized Sarah was not as interested in sex and didn’t want to take hormones to help with vaginal atrophy, and James didn’t pressure her. Their relationship and love have developed in many ways over the years, and they understand and care for each other.

When asked what advice he would give to another patient with his type of cancer, he said, “Speak to your cancer doctor and the nurses handling your case. Everybody’s different, so be specific with your questions and don’t be afraid to ask anything. The nurses tended to engage more in discussion and encouraged me to talk about anything. I wasn’t able to maintain an erection, and the fluid during ejaculation was reduced and clear, and I had a lot of fatigue. I was reassured that those changes were normal. You must be very open about what you are experiencing and feeling, even if it seems uncomfortable.” His final recommendation was to “Communicate, communicate, communicate fearlessly!”

For those experiencing struggles with communication and intimacy, Erin Sullivan Wagner shares[Getting Your Groove Back After Cancer Starts with a Conversation.](https://www.aftercancer.co/getting-your-groove-back-after-cancer-conversation/)