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Sex and Sexuality for Women After Cancer Treatment and Transplant: Yes, there are things that help!

Leslie Heron, RN, BSN, MN, APRN, FNP-BC
SCCA Survivorship Clinic, FHCRC Survivorship Program
Sex, really? You’ve got to be kidding!

- Yes, cancer affects how you feel physically, mentally, emotionally and energetically.
- Think you sex life if over because of transplant? Think again!
Sex and Sexuality: Two Parts of the Same Idea

- There’s **sex**, the activity...
- And **sexuality**, the feeling

Cancer affects sex **and** sexuality – **and not usually in a good way**!
How cancer treatments affect the body:

• Surgery
  Skin changes, Lymph Nodes, Blood Vessels, Nerves

• Radiation
  Burns, Fibrosis, Atrophy

• Transplant
  GVHD, Menopausal symptoms, Fatigue, Immune system
How cancer treatments affects the body, continued:

• Transplant & Chemotherapy
  – Low blood counts
  – Hair loss, skin rashes or skin sensitivity
  – Nausea, decreased appetite, vomiting, diarrhea, weight changes
  – Changes in “mucosal tissues” such as sores or dryness in the mouth, gut, vagina and rectum, GVHD
  – Menopausal changes
  – Fatigue

  – Not what really makes you feel so sexy...
Transplant affects sex and sexuality:

**Sex Effects:**
- skin sensitivity, texture
- vaginal dryness, atrophy, genital pain
- premature menopause
- fertility concerns
- weight changes
- scars and surgical changes
- bowel and bladder function changes
- extreme fatigue
Transplant affects sex and sexuality:

Sexuality Effects:
- Decreased desire, arousal, orgasm
- Confidence, body image, self esteem
- Reeling ‘over touched’ but ‘under held’
- Role changes (feeling like a ‘patient’ instead of a ‘lover’)
- Energy level
- Relationship satisfaction
- Fertility
- Depression, anger or anxiety

• for the partner: role changes, fear of causing pain, not wanting to be demanding
• Not knowing when or how to bring it up.
What can help? How do I start?

TALK about sex and sexuality:
- Worries, fears, wishes and desires
- Talk about how you feel
- Your partner is not a mind-reader!
- Ask for what you want, need or want to try
- Remind yourselves of when sex and intimacy were terrific
- Share a fantasy, movie or book
- Remember: there is no deadline or expectation
- Talk about ground rules that help you feel in control
What comes first?

• Your BRAIN is your biggest sex organ
• Think it through
• Set the ground rules
• Allow *time* to not feel rushed.

• *All of these considerations are the same alone or with a partner!*
Taking the next steps...

- Touch yourself, or guide your partner to touch you, in ways that feel good
- Move on to more sensual/sexual touching if that feels comfortable
- Use plenty of lubricant
- Go slowly, “check in” with what feels good
- Tears, talking, negotiating and even giggling is allowed
- Let every time be it’s own time – give yourself permission to try again
Things That Can Help

Lubricants

Water based:
• stays slippery, doesn’t stain, washes easily, can be used with any toys or condoms.

Silicone based:
• super slippery, can stain, should not be used with silicone toys.

Toys and Tools
- Dilators, dildos and fingers
- Vibrators: internal or external
- Many shapes, sizes and types
- Books and movies
- Clothing that makes you feel sexy
- Express what you’d like in writing if talking is too hard
- Asking for help
Things That Can Help

Vaginal Moisturizers

Over-the-counter products that can be used daily, like hand lotion

- Satin
- Yes
- Replense
- New Poise
- Liquidbeads
Things That Can Help

Hormone Products

Estrogen *(Rx needed)*
- Oral or patch
  - Progesterone if you have a uterus
- Vaginal – cream and ring
- Compounded creams

Phytoestrogens
- Dietary
- Supplements
- Topical
Resources: stores, websites and more

- **SCCA Resource Center** on the 3rd floor of the SCCA: lending library, booklets, magazines and community resources

- **SCCA Patient & Family Education** links on the SCCA website and on Facebook to educational events, resources and videos [www.seattlecca.org/practical-emotional-support.cfm](http://www.seattlecca.org/practical-emotional-support.cfm)

- **SCCA Survivorship Clinic** welcomes any cancer survivor who has completed their acute cancer treatment, at SCCA or any other location. 206-288-1024 [www.seattlecca.org/survivorship](http://www.seattlecca.org/survivorship)

- **Healthcare providers and staff:** doctors, NP’s, PA’s, nurses, psychologists, social workers, counselors, chaplains and others are willing to talk to patients, survivors and family members. Some providers are more comfortable than others – ask!

- **Shine:** *A unique cancer specialties store* 207 Pontius Ave N, Suite 101, with many books and products mentioned in this talk as well as cards, clothing, and more [www.sccashine.org](http://www.sccashine.org) 206-288-7560

- **Babeland:** *Seattle’s Adult Toy Store* 707 E Pike Street [www.babeland.com](http://www.babeland.com) 206-328-2914

- American Cancer Society [www.cancer.org](http://www.cancer.org)

- [www.livestrong.org](http://www.livestrong.org)

- Try web searches for articles and blogs using ‘cancer and sexuality’ or ‘healthy sexuality’ to avoid porn
Written material on cancer and sexuality

- Woman, Cancer, Sex by Anne Katz
- Man, Cancer, Sex by Anne Katz
- Intimacy After Cancer: A Woman’s Guide by Sally Kydd and Dana Rowett
- Sexuality for the Woman with Cancer by the American Cancer Society
- Sexuality for the Man with Cancer by the American Cancer Society
- Making Love Again: Hope for Couples Facing Loss of Sexual Intimacy by Keith Laken
- Sexuality and Fertility After Cancer by Leslie R. Schrorer
- Intimacy and Sexuality for Cancer Patients and Their Partners: A booklet of Tips and Ideas for Your Journey of Recovery (PDF) [www.sexualadviceassociation.co.uk](http://www.sexualadviceassociation.co.uk)
- Sexy Ever After by Patty Brisben and Keri Peterson, MD
- Childhood Cancer Survivors: A Practical Guide to Your Future by Nancy Keene, Wendy Hobbie and Kathy Ruccione

- Try searching Amazon or Barnes and Noble sites with key words ‘cancer and sexuality’
Question and Discussion Time!