

Sexual Problems and Prostate Cancer

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Sexual problems are common with prostate cancer.

- Different treatments can affect sexual function in different ways. Before your treatment starts, ask how it affects sexual function so you will know what to expect.

Treatments can cause changes in your:

- Erections
- Orgasms
- Ejaculation (when you orgasm)
- Sexual desire
- Feelings and attitudes about sex
- Fertility
 - › After treatment for prostate cancer, you may not be able to conceive a child. Talk to your cancer care team before starting treatment if you think you may want to conceive in the future.

Sexual problems after treatment can be caused by:

- **Side effects of treatment:** Things like pain and fatigue can make you less interested in having sex.
- **Hormone changes:** Hormonal therapy will cause your testosterone levels to drop. When testosterone levels drop, you may notice that you have less of a sex drive.
- **Surgery:** Surgery can change how you get aroused or have an orgasm. Some patients find that sex may be painful after surgery.
- **Your feelings:** Feelings of fear, anger, guilt, stress, anxiety and sadness are all a normal part of having cancer. These feelings can affect your interest in sex and how you feel about your partner.

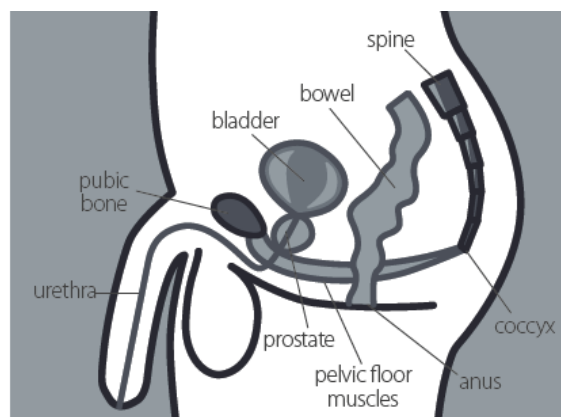
Talk to your healthcare team about any sexual problems you have.

Your health care team can help you with concerns you have about your sexual wellbeing. They may have recommendations or solutions for the problems you are experiencing.

Here are some tips to help manage or cope with sexual changes you may experience.

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| Talk about your feelings and concerns | <p>Talking to your partner and health care team about sex is an important first step to making things better. Talking about sex may not be easy or comfortable for you.</p> <p>Tips for talking to your partner about sex:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Share your feelings. If you are nervous or uncomfortable, try writing down your thoughts first.• Speak openly and honestly. It might be scary at first but if you share what you are feeling you can work through issues together. Talking about sexual changes can be good for both of you.• Work together. Make changes to your sex life together so that you can enjoy each other and be intimate. Tell your partner what you want and what feels good or does not feel good. <p>Tips for talking to your health care providers about sex:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• You can feel comfortable talking to your health care providers about sexual concerns. They are used to talking about how our bodies work.• Make a list of questions or concerns so you do not forget them. If you prefer, you can even give your health care team the list instead of saying the words. <p>Counselling can help. A counsellor can help you understand and cope with changes in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• how you feel sexual pleasure.• how your body functions during sex.• how your body looks and feels.• your relationships. <p>If you have a partner, going to counselling together can help you work through sex and relationship concerns as a team. You may also want to talk to a close friend or other patients who have had the same experiences. Let your healthcare team know if you are interested in joining a support group.</p> |
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| Erectile dysfunction | <p>Erectile dysfunction is when you have trouble getting or keeping an erection.</p> <p>Try to have frequent erections.</p> <p>This helps with blood flow to the penis and is important even if you are not having sex. Any type of blood flow to the penis is helpful. Keep up with any kind of touching, either by yourself or with your partner.</p> <p>Massage the penis even if it does not cause an erection.</p> <p>This will keep your tissues healthy and keep blood flowing to your penis.</p> <p>Eat well and exercise to keep your body at a healthy weight.</p> <p>Practice pelvic floor exercises to strengthen the pelvic floor muscles. These muscles (take a look at the diagram on this page to see where they are) are the muscles you squeeze to help you hold in your pee. To practice pelvic floor muscle exercises, you will need to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Squeeze your pelvic floor muscles. • Hold the squeeze for 10 seconds. • Relax for 10 seconds. • Repeat Steps 2 and 3 up to 10 times. • Do a set of 10 exercises 3 to 5 times a day. <p>For more information on this topic please read the Nova Scotia Health patient education pamphlet titled Kegel Exercises for Bladder Control: https://www.nshealth.ca/patient-education-resources/2538</p> |
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| Erectile dysfunction | Quit Smoking Smoking makes you more at risk for problems getting an erection. Ask your health care team for help with quitting or call 811 to access support programs. Cut down on the amount of alcohol you drink. Ask your healthcare team about medications and devices that could help. Try having fun with sexual activity that does not focus on intercourse. Remember that you can probably climax/orgasm even if your penis is not firm. |
| Changes in size and shape of the penis | Some cancer treatments can cause your penis to get shorter and smaller. You may feel upset by this change. Changes in size and shape may or may not happen with erectile dysfunction. Keep trying to get erections either with or without a partner. Blood flow to the penis can help to prevent the penis from getting smaller. Talk to your health care provider about using medications or devices to help with changes in shape and size. |
| Adapting to change | Sex and intimacy may change when you have cancer <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You may be used to thinking about sex as just intercourse. Sex can be any type of touching or intimate activity that makes you and your partner feel good and connected. • Cancer and treatments will change your body. • Your sex life will probably be different after having cancer. With time and effort you can have a good sex life again. |

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| <p>Body image</p> <p>Body image is how you see your body and feel about the way you look.</p> | <p>When cancer changes your body, you may feel unhappy and worried about how others see you.</p> <p>Give yourself time to adjust if you need to grieve any changes to your body and your sex life.</p> <p>Stay positive about your body:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remember that your body is only a small part of what makes you, you. • Be kind to yourself. You are likely harder on yourself than others ever will be. • Some changes to your body will not last forever and will get better over time. • For everything you find wrong with your body, look for something good. |
| <p>Low sex drive</p> | <p>A low sex drive can be caused by cancer treatment, the cancer itself or treatment side-effects like fatigue, nausea or painful intercourse. The effects of your low sex drive may be short-term or long-term.</p> <p>How to manage low sex drive:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In the short-term, you and your partner may be satisfied with affection like holding hands, hugs, massages, and cuddling. • In the long-term, you and your partner may need a plan to handle your low sex drive. A sexual health specialist can help. |
| <p>Incontinence: (a loss of control of your bladder or bowel functions).</p> | <p>Incontinence can make you feel awkward, embarrassed or anxious about sex.</p> <p>How to manage sex and incontinence:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plan to have sex at a time of day when you are the least tired. The muscles that control your bladder and bowels may work best when you feel most awake. • Go to the bathroom to empty your bladder and bowels before you have sex. • Use condoms during intercourse to capture leaking urine. • Practice pelvic floor exercises to strengthen pelvic floor muscles as described above. |

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| <p>Safe sex during cancer treatment</p> <p>During cancer treatment you and your partner may have to do things differently or not have sex for a short period of time.</p> | <p>Safety tips:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask your health care team if your treatment may harm an unborn baby and if you should use birth control. • If you have had surgery on your pelvis, wait until your doctor says you have healed enough before you have sex. • If you have anal sex, use a condom, try gentle positions with your partner and ask your health care provider if there are any other safety concerns you should think about. • If you have oral sex, use a condom or a dental dam. <p>All of the general rules for safe sex still apply when you have cancer:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use condoms to prevent sexually transmitted infections. • Use effective birth control if you do not want to become pregnant. • Choose sexual partners who make you feel safe. |
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Having sex cannot make your cancer get worse. For most people with cancer, sex can be safe and enjoyable.

Where to get more information:

- Canadian Cancer Society
 - › www.cancer.ca (Search for: Sexuality and Cancer)

Prostate Cancer Foundation of Australia

- › www.prostate.org.au (Search term: “Sexual problems”)

Prostate Cancer Canada

- › www.prostatecancer.ca (Search term: “Sexual side effects”)

Looking for more health information?

Find this brochure and all our patient resources here: <http://library.nshealth.ca/cancer>

Contact your local public library for books, videos, magazines, and other resources.

For more information, go to <http://library.novascotia.ca>

Patient and family feedback is very important to us.

We would like to invite you to send any comments or suggestions on how to improve this booklet to education.cancercare@nshealth.ca or feel free to call us at 1-866-599-2267.

*Prepared by: Nova Scotia Health Cancer Care Program
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It is not intended to replace the advice or professional judgment of a health care provider.

If you have any questions, please ask your health care provider.