

Sexual Health Counseling for Cancer Survivors

Cancer and its treatments can affect how you look and how you feel about yourself. It is normal to respond in different ways. Some people focus on physical changes and loss. Others worry about changes in their sex life or fertility. Others may think about how things will be with their partner now or about meeting a partner in the future.

This factsheet tells about possible changes and how working with a sexual health counselor can help.

What kinds of changes can happen?

You may have one or more of these issues:

- Less desire for sex
- For men, hard time getting or keeping an erection
- Pain during sex
- Trouble having an orgasm
- For women, dryness of the vagina

These changes in your sex life may go away over time. Changes with sex can make you feel less close to your partner. They can make you feel unhappy or bad about yourself.

Why am I having these issues?

Sexual issues often have more than one cause. Any of these things can be reasons:

- Cancer makes you too tired, stressed, depressed, or worried.
- Cancer treatment causes changes that make you feel bad about your body and yourself.
- Some cancer treatments can lower the amount of the chemicals that control sex in your body.
- Other conditions such as diabetes can also lead to issues.

How does sexual health counseling help?

Counseling can make your quality of life better:

- Help you be more confident and hopeful
- Help you feel better about your body and yourself
- Connect you to helpful resources

Your counselor will look at all possible sources of sexual issues. You and your counselor can work together to solve them. Your counseling plan may include these things:

- Showing you ways to feel better about your body and yourself
- Helping you and your partner find ways to feel close again
- Working with your care team to solve issues about your physical health

Because sex is such a personal issue, a good treatment plan will fit your personal needs—and your partner's.

How do I find a sexual health counselor?

The social worker on your care team can help you with the resources you need.

For more information

To learn more about social workers at Huntsman Cancer Institute and their Body Image Clinic, visit www.huntsmancancer.org/pfs

The G. Mitchell Morris Cancer Learning Center (CLC) is your source for free cancer information. Visit www.huntsmancancer.org/clc

To learn more about fertility issues and cancer, please see the factsheet *Fertility and Cancer*. The Utah Center for Reproductive Medicine at the University of Utah works with Huntsman Cancer Institute to help cancer patients with fertility issues. Call or visit: 801-581-3834 healthcare.utah.edu/fertility