

When you have cancer, you need to protect yourself and your partner during sex. Taking precautions helps in these ways:

- Protects you from infections. Some cancer treatments can weaken your immune system.
- Protects your partner. It keeps traces of cancer medicines from passing to your partner.
- Prevents pregnancy. Cancer treatment can harm a developing baby.

Protecting Yourself

Follow these precautions when you receive any type of cancer treatment:

- Wash your hands and genitals before and after all types of sexual activity.
- Use a condom to prevent infections and diseases that are passed on by sex.
 - Condoms are available for both males and females.
 - Never use both a male and female condom together.
 - Never reuse condoms.
- During male oral sex, use a male condom. During female oral sex, use a plastic film or dental dam.

Follow these precautions for specific types of cancer treatment.

When receiving chemotherapy. Some treatments make you more likely to get infections. You could get urinary tract or bloodstream infections. Ask your doctor whether having sex raises your risk for infection.

When receiving radiation therapy. Having sex is OK for men who get radiation. For most women who get radiation, it's OK unless you have genital bleeding.

For women, radiation to the lower belly can make sex hurt. If you get radiation in this area, wait to have sex for 2–4 weeks after treatments end.

After surgery. Some women have their uterus removed. This surgery is called a hysterectomy. If you had this operation, you need to heal for 4–6 weeks before having sex.

Protecting Your Partner

Your body fluids may contain traces of the cancer medicines you take. This can pose a risk to your sexual partner. You or your partner may want to think about using a barrier device for 1 week after each treatment. The table on page 2 gives examples of barrier devices. Talk with your doctor to learn if the medicines you take create this risk.

Protecting against Pregnancy

Talk to your doctor about how long after your treatment you should avoid getting pregnant. Most patients need to avoid pregnancy for 6 months to 1 year. The time may be shorter or longer, depending on your situation.

The table on page 2 shows methods of birth control. Most doctors recommend using TWO methods when you must avoid pregnancy. One of the methods should be a male or female condom.

You may not be able to use some types of birth control such as birth control pills. Talk to your doctor to find the best and safest methods of birth control for you.

If you become pregnant in spite of your precautions, talk to your doctor right away.

For information about cancer and having children, contact the Utah Center for Reproductive Medicine at the University of Utah.

Call 801-581-3834

Visit healthcare.utah.edu/ucrm

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Effective Birth Control Methods

Method	Examples	Comments
Total abstinence	Avoiding sex entirely	This is the most effective method of birth control.
Hormonal methods for women	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Birth control pills • Birth control shots or injections • Birth control implants • Birth control patches • Hormonal intrauterine devices, or IUDs • Vaginal rings 	Hormonal methods may not be best for you. Talk with your doctor about the best method for you.
Non-hormonal methods for women	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Birth control sponges • Cervical caps with spermicidal (sperm-killing) foam, jelly, or cream • Copper IUDs • Diaphragm with spermicidal foam, jelly, or cream • Female condoms 	Female condoms may lower the risk of infections. Do not use them together with a male condom.
Female sterilization surgeries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fallopian tubal ligation, or having tubes tied • Removal of BOTH ovaries • Hysterectomy, or removal of the uterus 	Removal of one ovary does NOT protect you from pregnancy.
Barrier devices for men	Condoms, preferably latex	Condoms may lower the risk of infections. Do not use them together with a female condom.
Male sterilization surgery	Vasectomy, or having tubes cut to keep sperm from leaving the body	

Withdrawing before ejaculation, or “pulling out,” is NOT an effective form of birth control.
 Avoiding sex during ovulation (calendar method) is also NOT effective.