Sexual Health after Testicular Cancer

Information for cancer survivors

Testicular cancer can affect people in many different ways. Sometimes it can change your ability to enjoy or have sex.

Read this pamphlet to learn about:

• Changes in sexual health
• How cancer treatment can affect sexuality
• What you can do to improve these changes
• When to talk to your doctor
• Where to get more information
What are some examples of how cancer impacts sexual change?

Impacts of cancer on sexuality include:

- having less interest in sex
- not being able to have an erection
- orgasm problems (taking longer to achieve orgasm)
- ejaculation problems (having an orgasm without any semen, or with urine instead of semen)

What can I expect?

Changes in sexual function due to cancer can vary. They depend on the type of cancer treatment that you had.

Most often, these problems can be treated and managed.

If you had 1 testicle removed

What are the effects?

Having one testicle removed should not cause any long-term sexual health functioning problems.

But, it can affect how you think and feel about sex. The stress and negative emotions of your cancer experience can make it harder to enjoy sex.

You may have:

- less sex drive
- some difficulty having an erection
- less sexual satisfaction
How long will these changes last?

These changes in sexual function usually go away on their own. They improve as you recover from your cancer treatment. It is important to know that everyone is different. Some men go back to the way their sex life was before faster than others.

What options do I have?

Some men feel less confident about having sex after losing a testicle. You may choose to have a prosthesis. A prosthesis is an artificial testicle to replace the lost testicle.

Can I still father a child?

Yes. Having 1 testicle removed should not affect your ability to father a child.

If both your testicles were removed

What are the effects?

You will lose interest in having sex. You may also experience:

- difficulty having an erection
- not being able to have an orgasm

What treatment can help?

You will probably need androgen replacement therapy. Spend time with your doctor to find the right kind of therapy for you. It may take a few months to find the right dose.

Can I still father a child?

No. Having both testicles removed causes permanent infertility.
If you had your lymph nodes removed (RPLND surgery)

RPLND surgery stands for retroperitoneal lymph node dissection. If you had this surgery, your lymph glands were removed at the back of your belly area.

What are the effects?

You will still be able to have an erection or an orgasm. Sometimes there is a small risk that nerves were cut that control ejaculation.

This can lead to:

• changes in ejaculation
• dry orgasms (having an orgasm without any semen)

You may also feel less desirable because of large scars from a RPLND. You may worry about your partner’s reaction.

Studies show that couples adjust to changes in body image and can keep enjoying sex.

If you had radiation or chemotherapy

What are the effects?

There are no lasting changes to sexual function (such as erection, orgasm and ejaculation).

Some men lose sexual desire (libido). This is because of fatigue from cancer treatment. Their energy level usually improves over time. Many men go back enjoying their sex life.
How do radiation and chemotherapy affect fertility?

Radiation therapy may cause a decrease in fertility, which lasts about 1 to 2 years.

After chemotherapy, it may take 2 years or more for your fertility to return to normal. Remember that you can still enjoy sex, even if you have problems with making sperm.

What can I do?

What can I do if I have erection problems?

Talk to your doctor

If you are not able to have or keep an erection, your doctor may want to:

- make changes to your medicine
- prescribe medicine (such Viagra or androgen replacement)
- suggest devices or other ways to help you with erections

Try Kegel exercises

- You can try Kegel exercises to help make your pelvic muscle stronger. These exercises also improve blood circulation to the genital area.
- Squeeze the muscle around your pelvic area. Hold it for 10 seconds. Then relax.
- Do this 5 to 10 times. Repeat it at least 5 times a day.
Avoid alcohol

- Avoid drinking alcohol before having sex. Alcohol can make it harder to keep an erection.

Try regular exercise

- Exercise makes your body strong. Take time for your hobbies and do what makes you feel good.

Find ways to relax

- It is normal to have mixed feelings after cancer. Try to find ways to relax. Be gentle with yourself. It can take some time to go back to a normal sex life.

What if I have difficulties with sexual interest or orgasm?

Tell your doctor. Your doctor may want to give you androgen replacement therapy, or change your therapy. This may take some time to figure out. If you work together with your doctor you can improve these difficulties.

What can I do about infertility?

You may have already chosen to use a sperm bank before your cancer treatment. If so, you can talk to your doctor about planning a family.
How do I talk to my partner about these problems?

Talk openly and honestly with your partner. This may help both you and your partner feel less worried.

Here are some other ideas that may help:

- Experiment with different touches, positions, or sexual activities.
- Be aware of your emotions. Get professional help if needed.
- Plan ahead and rest.
- Create an intimate environment (using soft music, candles or your favourite scent).
- Learn what makes you and your partner feel good without intercourse.

How do I talk to my doctor about my concerns?

Some people are embarrassed to talk to their doctor about changes in sexual function due to cancer. Remember that there are no stupid questions. Your doctor is there to help you.

You can talk to your cancer specialist, your family doctor or another member of your health care team. They can suggest a counsellor who is an expert in sexual problems.
Where can I get more information?

See these websites for more information:

- **American Cancer Society**
  www.cancer.org/index

- **Cancer Quest**

- **Everyday Health**

- **TC-Cancer. Com**
  http://www.tc-cancer.com/tcsex.html

- **Livestrong**

**Remember:**

- ✔ Talk to your doctor
- ✔ Try Kegel exercises
- ✔ Avoid alcohol
- ✔ Try regular exercise
- ✔ Find ways to relax
- ✔ Be open and honest with your partner