

# Questions and Answers About Sex and Prostate Cancer

Men who have cancer of the prostate usually have questions or concerns about the effects this cancer and its treatment may have on their sexuality. This handout gives answers to some commonly asked questions. Sexuality is more than the act of sexual intercourse (sex). It involves your thoughts, feelings and your spirituality. Remember that your sexuality is unique to you. You may find some of this information does not apply to you and your situation.

Please discuss your concerns with a member of your health care team and ask for a free copy of The American Cancer Society (ACS) booklet, **Sexuality for the Man Who Has Cancer**. You may also call ACS at 1-800-ACS-2345 and ask them to mail you a copy of the booklet. More information on this topic can be found by visiting the ACS website at [www.cancer.org](http://www.cancer.org).

## **Q: Is Prostate Cancer catching?**

**A:** No, cancer cannot be given to anyone else. You cannot give cancer to your partner by hugging, kissing, touching, or having intercourse.

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**Learn more about your health care.**

**Q: If I am too tired or do not feel well, enough for sex, how do I let my partner know that I still care?**

**A:** Your cancer or the treatments may make you feel tired and you may not want to have sex. Be honest with your partner about how you feel. You can still be close with your partner by touching, kissing, stroking, or massage. Loving words or gestures are other ways to express your feelings.

**Q: Can I have an erection?**

**A:** Depending on your treatment, you may not be able to have an erection. Any of the treatments used can cause impotence. Impotence is when the penis fails to become or stay erect. Nerve damage is the most frequent reason why men have erectile dysfunction (ED) after treatment. The injury or trauma to the nerves can be caused by surgery, radiation therapy or because of hormonal therapy or chemotherapy. Even if the nerves are saved, such as with robotic prostatectomy, they may have damage or injury and be slow to heal.

**Q: Can I still have an orgasm?**

**A:** Even if you cannot have an erection, you can still have orgasms. However, your orgasms will be dry because your prostate is not producing fluid. This will not take away from sexual pleasure.

**Q: When will I know if I can have an erection?**

**A:** Your doctor will talk with you about what to expect based on your treatment.

**Q: Is there anything that can help me have an erection?**

**A:** For men that have prostate cancer there are a variety of ways you can be helped to achieve an erection after treatment. At The Ohio State University Medical Center there is an ED Rehabilitation program available to men who have a robotic prostatectomy. Talk to your urologist about treatment options. You may discuss a referral to the ED clinic or a consultation with a specialist.

**Q: Will I still want to have sex with my partner?**

**A:** It is normal to lose interest in sex during cancer treatment, at least for a time. When people are being treated for cancer, other issues such as worry, depression, nausea, pain, or fatigue may cause a loss of desire. Cancer treatments that disturb the normal hormone balance can also lessen sexual desire.

**Q: If I am having radiation therapy, am I radioactive?**

**A:** There are two types of radiation therapy used to treat prostate cancer. The first type is external radiation, given from outside the body. With external radiation therapy, you are not radioactive. Your partner will not get any radiation.

The other type of radiation therapy is internal. Radioactive pellets or seeds will stay in the prostate permanently. The seeds are radioactive for only a short time. The tissue around the prostate will absorb most of the radiation. It is all right to touch, hug and kiss your partner. For more information about this treatment, ask your nurse for the patient education handout, **Radioactive Prostate Implant**.

**Q: Is it all right for me to have sex during or after treatment?**

**A:** The answer to this question depends on the treatment. If you have had surgery, usually you should wait 4 to 6 weeks before having sex. Ask your doctor when it is safe to have sex.

If you are treated with chemotherapy, hormone therapy or external radiation therapy, you can usually have sex without waiting. If sex is uncomfortable, talk with your doctor or nurse about ways to make it more comfortable. You may need to try different positions or take a nap before sex. Include your partner in these discussions and talk openly about your concerns.

If you have other questions or concerns, please talk to your doctor or a member of your health care team.