

Sex and Intimacy after Prostate Cancer

Marianne Brandon Ph.D.

www.DrBrandon.Net

Psychology Today blog "The
Future of Intimacy"

Outline

- Sexual changes that occur with age
- Additional challenges caused by cancer treatment
 - Low desire
 - Urine leakage
 - Erectile dysfunction
- Reconnecting sexually with your partner

Take Home Messages:

- ▮ Sexual concerns and challenges are common
- ▮ Even a little attention to your love life can go a long way
- ▮ There's so much more to intimacy than intercourse



Intimacy is Important

- ▮ Intimacy correlates with relationship, life satisfaction
- ▮ Intimacy helps counteract stress, depression
- ▮ Intimacy gives meaning to our lives

Making Love is Challenging:

- ❖ But, life closes us
- ❖ Sexual satisfaction decreases as relationship ages
 - ❖ Habituate to partner
 - ❖ Sexual ruts
 - ❖ Physical changes with age
- ❖ 20% of marriages are sexless
- ❖ 40% of women, 30% of men report a sexual concern or dysfunction

His Sexual Changes with Age

- ▮ Less rigid erection
- ▮ More stimulation required to get erect
- ▮ Longer time to orgasm
- ▮ Less intense orgasm
- ▮ Decreased quantity of semen
- ▮ More time needed between ejaculations

Her Sexual Changes with Age

- ▮ Less intense orgasms
- ▮ Longer time to orgasm
- ▮ Decreased lubrication
- ▮ Thinning of vaginal walls – pain, infections
- ▮ Vagina constricts without sex

Changes for Men Post-Treatment

- ▢ Surgery:
 - ▢ Incontinence
 - ▢ Urination with arousal, orgasm
 - ▢ Erectile Dysfunction
 - ▢ Loss of ejaculation
- ▢ Radiation:
 - ▢ Negative effects on erections are delayed
 - ▢ Ejaculate volume reduced
- ▢ Androgen Deprivation:
 - ▢ Decreased libido, ED, decreased semen volume

Emotional Challenges After Prostate CA Treatment

- ❖ Unprepared for changes
 - ❖ Feel grief, loss, shock
- ❖ Avoid talking to partner
 - ❖ Feel embarrassed
 - ❖ Assuming there are no solutions
- ❖ Nervous talking to doctor
- ❖ Less touching, hugging

Unique Challenges for Sexual Minority Men

- Heteronormative bias among medical practitioners
- Reliance on prostate stimulation
 - Anodyspareunia
- Reliance on erection strength
 - Esp. if predominantly top

Cancer and Depression

- ▢ Cancer diagnosis increases anxiety and depression for patient, loved ones
- ▢ Most depressed cancer patients not receiving treatment for mood
- ▢ Depression can appear as:
 - ▢ Lack of motivation
 - ▢ Lack of pleasure in previously enjoyable activities
 - ▢ Low energy
 - ▢ Low libido
- ▢ Plus, Androgens help regulate mood!

Managing Low Sex Drive

- ❖ R/O Depression
 - ❖ Medications with fewer sexual side effects
 - Bupropion, Remeron, Rexulti
 - ❖ Exercise!
 - ❖ Psychotherapy
- ❖ Meditation, yoga (connect to body)

Managing Low Sex Drive: Amplify Sexual Excitement

- ❖ Sexual Fantasies
 - ❖ “Men In Love” or “My Secret Garden” (Nancy Friday)
 - ❖ “A Billion Wicked Thoughts” (Ogas and Gaddam)
- ❖ Porn and erotica
- ❖ Masturbation (sex toys)

Addressing Desire Discrepancy

- ❖ It's typical
- ❖ Initiating sex feels vulnerable, so decline lovingly
- ❖ Compromises other than intercourse?
 - ❖ Hold partner while they masturbate
 - ❖ Fondle them
- ❖ If possible, maintain intimate contact
- ❖ "Good Enough Sex" – Barry McCarthy

Managing Urine Leakage

- Talk with partner
- Condoms during sex
- Drink less fluid
- Urinate before sex
- Constriction ring at base of penis
- Pelvic floor muscle training

Erectile Dysfunction

- ❖ Talk with your doctor
- ❖ Amp up stimulation
 - ❖ Before sex: Sex toys for men
 - ❖ Penile vibrator
- ❖ Constriction ring
- ❖ General health important:
 - ❖ Exercise, avoid nicotine, Mediterranean Diet

Planning for Difficult Moments

- ▢ Expect them!
 - ▢ Don't pull back, roll away
- ▢ Develop an agreed upon plan – continue with sex toys, cuddle....

- ▢ Remember: more to sex than intercourse

PDE5-I's

- Daily or prn dosing
- May need increased dose
- Each has different side effects
- Still requires sexual stimulation to get erect
- "Good Rx" app to reduce cost

- Exercise, Mediterranean Diet can augment

Intracavernosal Therapy

- Useful for failures of PDE5 inhibitors or when contraindicated
- Self injection technique
- Administered at base of penis – impacts smooth muscle
- 80% effective

Vacuum Devices

- ▮ Vacuum to the penis enhances blood flow
- ▮ A constricting ring is applied at the base to maintain rigidity
- ▮ Complaints: not natural

Penile Prosthetic Implants

- Semi rigid or inflatable
- Risks: Infection, mechanical failure
- Satisfaction generally good

What You Can Always Do

- ▣ Hug and Touch
- ▣ Kiss
- ▣ Slow dance
- ▣ Massage
- ▣ Sex toys for you both
- ▣ Orgasm (erection, ejaculation not required)

Sex Toys for Men:



Sex Toys for Women:



Maintaining Her Satisfying Sex Life

- Lubricants
- Dilator therapy – www.soulsource.com
- Vibrators
- Body: staying fit and active
 - How you feel vs look
- Hormone therapy

First Step: Communicate

- ❖ How you like to be touched, talked to
- ❖ What you like
- ❖ What you'd like to do differently
- ❖ New things to try
- ❖ How your partner can help you feel more comfortable being vulnerable

Reconnecting Sexually

- ❖ Take turns initiating OR
- ❖ Schedule intimacy dates:
 - ❖ Slow dance in the kitchen
 - ❖ Laying together naked
 - ❖ Massage, no genitals
 - ❖ Sensual massage, no sex
 - ❖ Intercourse: double foreplay time

Reconnecting Sexually

- ❖ Start with yourself: Open body and heart
 - ❖ Relax:
 - ❖ Meditation
 - ❖ Yoga poses
 - ❖ Hot bath
 - ❖ Connect to Sensual Self: Foreplay for your foreplay
 - ❖ Read erotica
 - ❖ Watch porn
 - ❖ Masturbate without orgasm

Skills of Love-making

Before Sex:

- Heart open: Feeling loving before beginning
- Embodied: Feeling physically receptive before beginning

During Sex:

- Maintain contact: eyes, touch
- Communicating love, pleasure with words, sounds

After Sex:

- Tender contact

Website and Books:

- SexualityResources.com
 - Sexuality Resources

Books:

- *Saving Your Sex Life: A Guide for Men with Prostate Cancer* (Mulhall)
- *Prostate Cancer and the Man You Love: Supporting and Caring for Your Partner* (Katz)

Final Thoughts

- Talk tonight while info fresh in your mind
 - Plan for ongoing communication
- Everyone's sex life ebbs and flows over time
- We can all learn to give and receive love better



Remember that you are making love to a human being. A person who longs to feel close to you, to feel accepted and loved by you, to feel genuinely cared for by you. These are probably the greatest gifts we can give another human being. Remember that you can inspire those feelings in the way you touch; the way you look at your partner; and the words you chose while love-making. In these ways, you hold your partners heart in your hands. In these ways, you create moments that deepen and enhance your relationship.