Sexual Health

Cancer and its treatment can cause changes in your body that make sex unsatisfying or uncomfortable. This can make you feel less close to your partner and impact your well-being. Changes in sexual health may be temporary or permanent. No matter what challenges you face, help is available.

What Causes Sexual Problems?

Any of these factors may contribute to sexual problems:
- Fatigue, stress, depression, anxiety, or worry
- Negative body image and low self-esteem
- Side effects of cancer treatment such as radiation, surgery, chemotherapy, or hormonal therapy
- Physical changes caused by surgery, chemotherapy, or medicines
- Lower levels of hormones due to surgery or hormone-blocking medicines
- Medical problems such as diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, or other issues

What Are the Symptoms?

The symptoms of cancer-related sexual problems may include one or more of the following:
- Less desire for sex
- Difficulty getting or keeping an erection
- Pain during intercourse
- Trouble with feeling aroused
- Trouble with having an orgasm
- Vaginal dryness

How Counseling Can Help

Sexual problems often have more than one cause. A good counseling plan will address all sources of sexual problems. It will also help build and strengthen closeness between you and your partner. Because sex is such a personal issue, a good treatment plan will fit your personal needs—and your partner’s.

Counseling looks at health issues that could be causing the problem, and counselors work with your medical team to resolve these issues. It will teach you and your partner ways to communicate better. It will help you find practical solutions for getting close again.

Counseling can improve your quality of life in many ways:
- Increase your confidence and hopefulness
- Connect you to helpful information and resources
- Address body image and self-esteem concerns
- Explore emotional impacts of cancer and treatment

Sexual function is complex and changes over time. Addressing the changes in sexual function can improve your overall quality of life.

For more information, ask your doctor or nurse to contact the social worker on your health care team, or visit www.huntsmancancer.org/sexual-health.