

Sexuality and Cancer Treatment: Information for Adolescent and Young Adult Males

We know that cancer treatment affects all areas of your life. This includes sexuality. Sexuality includes how you see yourself as a male, how you feel about yourself, your sexual orientation, wanting to feel close to others, wanting to have sex, and how your body responds to sex.

Having cancer can affect all of these areas of your sexuality.

Sexual activity includes all forms of sexual activity including intercourse, masturbation, and vaginal, oral and anal sex.

If you are having intimate sexual contact with anyone it is important that you talk with your healthcare team about it. This can be your clinic or inpatient nurse, your physician, nurse practitioner or social worker.

Your conversations with your healthcare team about sex, pregnancy, birth control and sexually transmitted infections will be confidential.

Changes in your body and mind

When you are receiving treatment for cancer it is normal to have changes in the way you feel about relationships. You may have changes in your body such as hair loss, scars from surgery, central lines, weight loss or weight gain and feeling tired with low energy. Having less energy combined with other physical changes may affect your interest in having sex. These changes may also affect your ability to become sexually aroused. This is normal and temporary.

Finding other ways of feeling close

You may feel too tired or weak to have sex and you may worry about being able to satisfy your partner. It is important to remember relationships can survive without having sex. You can find ways to feel close to your partner by kissing, holding, cuddling and spending time alone together.

Sexual activity during treatment

It is important to prevent a pregnancy while receiving treatment. Your sperm may be damaged by chemotherapy and or radiation. This damage could cause birth defects. Even if your partner is using birth control we recommend you use condoms for your protection.

Your usual sexual feelings and desires will return and it is OK to have sex during treatment.

When you are ready, take it slow and try to have open conversations with your partner about sex and your feelings.

There are times when there may be medical risks. It is not safe to have sex when your blood counts are low. In general your platelets should be over 50,000 and your ANC greater than 1000. This is because there are risks of infections and bleeding. It is possible to get a sexually



transmitted infection during treatment. You should protect yourself by using a condom every time you have sex.

Sexual activity and chemotherapy

It is generally recommended to wait 72 hours after chemotherapy to have sex. This reduces the chance of chemotherapy exposure for your partner. This is the average time it takes chemotherapy to leave your body.

Resources:

www.cancer.org

www.cancer.gov

www.fertilehope.com

www.livestrong.org

www.curesearch.org