

Sex, Intimacy, and Cancer

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Disclaimer

- ⦿ This presentation includes frank descriptions of sexual anatomy, behavior, and pleasure.
- ⦿ I wrote this presentation to emphasize a lot of answers and responses in a short period of time. A more specific answer is likely to be required for your specific journey. Hopefully these answers and the references at the end will point you in a direction and provide hope.

The Real Message

Intimacy > Cancer

A Presentation in Two Sections

- “What?” questions.
- Practical information and suggestions addressing “How?” questions.

“What” questions

- ◉ Menopause-like side effects
- ◉ Breast changes

Menopause-like symptoms

- ◉ The most common sexual side effects of cancer include:
 - > Decreased libido
 - > Decreased vaginal lubrication
 - > Pain during penetration.
 - > Difficulty with orgasm.

Menopause-like symptoms (continued)

- The most common sexual side effects include [cont.]:
 - > Vaginal Atrophy*
 - > Hot flashes

**I prefer “vaginal efficiency”*

Menopause-like effects on a relationship

“As the vision-obscuring veil created by the hormones of reproduction begins to lift, a woman’s youthful fire and spirit are often rekindled, together with long-sublimated desires and creative drives. Midlife fuels those drives with a volcanic energy that demands an outlet.”

–Christiane Northrup, M.D.

Counteracting Menopause-like Side Effects on Relationship

- ◉ Maintaining the intimate connection that sexuality might once have fueled now needs to shift into conscious attention and intention.
- ◉ Practices that can help include:
 - > Established rituals (check-ins) for maintaining conversational and relational connection.
 - > Habits of kissing and touching that are conscious.
 - > Special times to connect.

What can you do about menopause-like symptoms?

- Use dilators consistently. Have sex.
- Moisturize your vagina regularly/daily with a lubricant
- Lubricate more for sex
- Diet: Talk with your doctor
- Talk with your doctor about medications, many affect libido.
- Mental and physical stimulation. Reading erotica or romance novels, fantasizing, and masturbation with dilators, massagers, or vibrators to maintain vaginal blood flow can prevent atrophy and decrease other side effects.

What you can do (continued)

- Reverse atrophy
 - > Topical Estrogen
 - > Topical Replens
 - > Topical testosterone

Breast Changes

- ◉ What you can do about loss of sensitivity:
 - > Make a sensory map (together?)
 - > Use mindful awareness to emphasize and enhance awareness of sensations that you find.
 - > Use mindful awareness to find and expand the power of other erogenous zones.

“How” Questions

- How to talk about it
- How to reestablish intimacy and sex after treatment
- How to cultivate arousal and desire
- How to navigate the new normal
- How to heal body image

Schnarch-Talking About It

- Want to know if your partner wants more? Ask.
- Concerned that you might be fragilizing your partner or that your partner is fragilizing you? Ask.
- Wondering if now is a good time to reintroduce sex into your relationship or not? Ask.
- Wanting to introduce a non-intercourse practice into your sex life but you aren't sure how your partner will feel about it? Ask.

Reestablishing Intimacy- Sensate Focus

- 3 Stages: Nonsexual areas, sexual areas without a goal for orgasm, and sexual activity without a goal for orgasm.

Reestablishing Intimacy- Sensate Focus

◎ Basics:

- > Remove a “sex” as an option at first.
- > Eliminate an orgasm goal orientation.
- > Identify a giver and receiver; switch later.
- > Giver tries to offer pleasing touch (all kinds, not just massage).
- > Receiver focuses on physical sensations (temperature, texture, pressure).
 - Gives gentle feedback by asking for more of what they want.
- > Debrief
- > Switch roles and repeat.

3 Types of Desire

- ◉ Spontaneous Desire
- ◉ Responsive Desire
- ◉ Contextual Desire

Expand the Possibilities

- ◉ Real sex is sex that is pleasurable and connective. So consider adding or emphasizing:
 - > Emotional intimacy
 - > Foreplay
 - > Manual stimulation
 - > Oral sex
 - > Prostate stimulation
 - > Mutual masturbation
 - > Sex toys
 - > Different positions
 - > Finding the eroticism of your whole body
 - > More eye contact
 - > Taking turns with pleasure giving and receiving
 - > Laughter & playfulness
 - > Removing orgasm as a goal
 - > Reading erotica to each other
 - > Role play
 - > Exploring and sharing fantasies
 - > More lubrication
 - > Slowing down
 - > Set & setting

Morin-New Normal

- ◉ Clarify your goals and motivations
- ◉ Cultivate Self-Affirmation
- ◉ Navigate the Gray Zone
- ◉ Acknowledge and Mourn Your Losses
- ◉ Come to Your Senses
- ◉ Risk the Unfamiliar
- ◉ Integrate your Discoveries

How to Address Self-image Changes

- ◉ Increase Body Image Confidence
 - > Develop appreciation of your body through viewing it in a mirror
 - > Cultivate an attitude that reclaims your body from cancer
 - > Share experiences with other women
- ◉ Increase Sexual Confidence
 - > Masturbate to learn your new erotic process.
 - > Let your partner love your new body. Partners, love boldly.

Body Image-Love and Vulnerability

- One of the gifts of sexuality is its power. It can claim and chose and love. If your partner is feeling hesitant in her body consider how your ability to see, claim, and to caress her new body has the power to offer her healing.
- One of the challenges about low body image is that it causes the person to hide. Yet, the very antidote for low body image is sharing and vulnerability.
- These two potentials, love and vulnerability, will need to dance with each other before figuring out the steps.

The Real Message

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References

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