

Sex and intimacy in patients with cancer

The key points to remember about sex and intimacy with your condition are:

- It's OK to talk about it
- It's important to seek further advice and information if there are problems.
- Communicating with your partner about your concerns and needs is important, so that you can work together to make sex safe and enjoyable.
- There is no one 'right way' to be sexually fulfilled.

General Guidelines

— based on guidelines developed by Kate Lorig, author of 'Living a Healthy Life with Chronic Conditions'.

- Avoid sexual activity when you feel really tired.
- Avoid sexual activity right after a big meal.
- Avoid drinking alcohol before sex.
- Avoid sexual activity soon after chemotherapy.
- Try to establish a calm and relaxed atmosphere. Choose times when you are rested.
- Remember – stressful or highly emotional conversations tend to cause anxiety and are not conducive to satisfying sexual activities.
- Find positions that are comfortable for both of you. There is no 'right way' to have sex. Try to achieve open communication with your partner about what you like and want in the course of sexual activities. To avoid shortness of breath, try positions that require less energy.
- If you have trouble with sexual performance, check with your regular doctor.
- Physical fitness will enhance sexual performance, so maintain the exercise program prescribed by your doctor or physiotherapist.
- If you are having problems with arousal or with loss of interest in sex, it may be due to depression or anxiety. This is usually temporary. If time and patience do not resolve the problem, you might consider consulting a professional experienced in sexual counselling.
- Enjoy a 'romantic weekend'...

Remember: there are other ways to express love, such as touching and hugging.

Attitude and communication are the keys to resuming and maintaining the sexual and intimate aspects of your relationship. Believe that sex and intimacy are necessary and rewarding parts of your life, and communicate that to your partner. Keep things in perspective - remember that all couples have difficulties sometimes and seeking advice is okay.