



# Sex and Intimacy

## Post-Webinar Resources Page

If you struggle with discussing sex and intimacy with your partner or your doctor, you are not alone. According to the 2013 National Comprehensive Cancer Network guidelines for survivorship care, up to 50% of breast and gynecologic cancer survivors report having sexual problems, although people often do not get the help they need to address these difficulties.

In **Uniquely You: *Embracing Sex and Intimacy After Cancer***, the **sixth** session in our “**Uniquely You**” series, we delve into the tough questions and offer suggestions on ways to stimulate creativity, enhance playfulness, and ignite pleasure as you discover and revive your own sexuality following a cancer diagnosis. We encourage you to be patient as you redefine intimacy through comfort and connectedness.

Your resource guide will provide definitions, additional reading material, and support group information that might be valuable to you along your journey.

### **PART 1: Definitions, Tools, and Treatments**

**Sex** — for the purposes of our discussion, sex involves anything that penetrates the vagina. It can also include non-penetrative methods that stimulate the clitoris and other nerves in the vulva.

**Intimacy** — for the purposes of our discussion, intimacy includes non-sex related activities. Intimacy can include the act of sex, but it is a standalone concept. Intimacy generally includes touch, arousal, and closeness. It is a personally defined connection and can be enjoyed alone or between two people.

Although there are tools that can possibly make sex more comfortable after cancer, these options also help to maintain overall vaginal health and well-being even if you are not sexually active.

#### **Some tools and treatments may include:**

**Moisturizer:** For people who have vaginal itching, pain, and irritation due to dryness, especially associated with the loss of estrogen. Can be applied inside the vagina with an internal applicator (such as a needleless syringe) or finger once daily or several times per week. Moisturizers can also be used on outside vulvar areas. Can be purchased over-the-counter locally or from on-line retailers without a prescription.

**Lubricant:** For people who experience vaginal and/or vulva dryness and irritation during sex or when using a dilator. Can be used in addition to a moisturizer. Should be reapplied to vulva and vagina and/or partner genitals several times as needed during intercourse. Can be purchased over-the-counter locally or from on-line retailers without a prescription.

**Dilator:** A plastic or silicone tube used to stretch the vaginal space slowly and deeply over time. Available in graduated sizes to increase degree of penetration. Goal is to reduce pain with vaginal penetration, improve blood flow, and strengthen pelvic floor muscles. Can be purchased over-the-counter locally or from on-line retailers without a prescription.

**Vibrator:** A vibrating massage wand that enhances sexual stimulation and arousal. As you internally massage the vagina, you improve the blood flow and strengthen the integrity of vulvar and vaginal skin. Can help with scar tissue that forms after radiation treatments. Some vibrators are also designed to stimulate the clitoris, or more external areas. Can be purchased over-the-counter locally or from on-line retailers without a prescription.

**Body mapping:** Self-discovery of pleasurable or painful spots on your own body. May be explored sexually with a partner or as an individual.

**Vaginal or Erotic massage:** Massaging vulvar and vaginal areas helps stimulate arousal and desire, reduces scar tissue, promotes adequate blood flow, and keeps skin stretchy. Can be done alone or with a partner.

**Kegels/Pelvic floor exercises:** When you pee, you push using your muscles. When you stop peeing, you pull using your muscles. These muscles are called Kegel muscles. When you exercise these muscles by contracting and relaxing them, you strengthen them. Strong muscles lead to better overall vaginal health and can improve ability to achieve orgasm (for some).

**Mindfulness-based cognitive therapy:** Intentionally focusing on your thoughts and how they influence desire and arousal. Techniques may include breathing exercises or meditation to increase sexual satisfaction and enjoyment. This is an individualized therapy.

**Sensate focus exercises:** Techniques designed to help couples enjoy intimacy and connectedness without the pressure of sexual performance. Can also be done as a single person. Often involves touch, massage, and exploring different sensations of the body while keeping stress levels low. Encourages first steps towards embracing pleasurable touch.

**Topical estrogen preparation:** An option for some women based on diagnosis and situation along with gynecologic oncologist recommendation and shared decision-making. Available as a prescription vaginal cream, vaginal ring, or vaginal tablet. User applies a small amount of estrogen to the affected area to replenish skin elasticity and thickness. Provides relief from vaginal atrophy which is thin, dry, itching, and burning vulvar and vaginal skin.

## **PART 2: Sexual Health Clinic Options for Gynecologic Cancer Survivors**

\*This list is not exhaustive and is subject to change. You may find other suitable organizations in the area where you live if you ask your gynecologic oncologist or medical team for assistance.

### **University of Wisconsin Carbone Cancer Center—Women’s Integrative Sexual Health Program Madison, WI**

<https://www.uwhealth.org/uw-carbone-cancer-center/womens-integrative-sexual-health-wish-program/39086>

<https://www.uwhealth.org/findadoctor/clinic/1255>

### **University of Chicago Cancer Center—PRISM Clinic Chicago, IL**

<https://www.uchicagomedicine.org/cancer/types-treatments/prism-clinic>

### **Northwestern Medicine—Center for Sexual Medicine and Menopause Chicago, IL**

<https://www.nm.org/locations/center-for-sexual-medicine-and-menopause>

### **Palos Health—Pelvic Floor Dysfunction Program (for incontinence)**

Palos Heights, IL

<https://www.paloshealth.com/medical-services/womens-health/gynecology/urinary-incontinence/>

### **Dana Farber Cancer Institute—Sexual Health Program Boston, MA**

<https://www.dana-farber.org/for-patients-and-families/care-and-treatment/support-services-and-amenities/sexual-health-program/>

### **Massachusetts General Hospital—Sexual Health Clinic Boston, MA**

<https://www.massgeneral.org/cancer-center/treatments-and-services/sexual-health-clinic>

**Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center—Female Sexual Medicine and Women’s Health Program**

New York, NY

<https://www.mskcc.org/experience/living-beyond-cancer/services-survivors/female-sexual-medicine-women-health>

**Mayo Clinic—Menopause and Women’s Sexual Health Clinic**

Rochester, MN

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/departments-centers/menopause-womens-sexual-health/overview/ovc-20487915>

**Spectrum Health Cancer—Menopause and Sexual Health Clinic**

Grand Rapids, MI

<https://www.spectrumhealth.org/patient-care/cancer/supportive-integrative-and-palliative-care/cancer-menopause-and-sexual-health>

**Lifespan Cancer Institute—Sexual Health Clinic**

Providence, RI

<https://www.lifespan.org/centers-services/lifespan-cancer-institute/sexual-health-first-responders-clinic>

**Seattle Cancer Care Alliance—Survivorship Clinic**

Seattle, WA

<https://www.seattlecca.org/treatments/continuing-care/survivorship-clinic>

**PART 3: On-line Resources**

**Foundation for Women’s Cancer**

[https://www.foundationforwomenscancer.org/wp-content/uploads/2019-FWC-Patient-Education-Handouts-Sexuality\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.foundationforwomenscancer.org/wp-content/uploads/2019-FWC-Patient-Education-Handouts-Sexuality_FINAL.pdf)

**Everything Nobody Tells You About Cancer Treatment and Your Sex Life. From A to Za Za Zoom...**

(Dr. Marianne Matzo / Catherine Graham)

<http://kanwa.org/>

**Sexual Health Wellness Store and Sexual Health Education**

<https://femaniwellness.com>

**National LGBT Cancer Network**

<https://cancer-network.org/>

**National LGBT Cancer project**

<https://www.lgbtcancer.org>

**Facebook group for LGBTQ support**

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/soundslikeTransEducation>

**Woman Cancer Sex – EBook by Anne Katz, RN, PhD**

ISBN-10: 0367544997 (Available as E-book \$, paperback \$ and hardcover \$\$\$)

## **PART 4: Online Retailers:**

<https://www.babeland.com/>  
<https://boutiqueg.com/>  
<https://www.comeasyouare.com/>  
<https://www.cmtmedical.com/>  
<https://www.evesgarden.com/>  
<https://www.goodvibes.com/s/>  
<https://www.ohmibod.com/>  
<https://www.pureromance.com>  
<https://sexualityresources.com/>  
<https://www.soulsource.com/>  
<https://www.vaginismus.com/>

## **PART 5: Helpful Tips to Enhance Sex and Intimacy**

1. Keep vaginal and vulva skin elastic or stretchy and hydrated
2. Promote adequate blood flow with vaginal massage and routine physical activity
3. Pelvic floor muscle strength and tone maintenance
4. Use your imagination and explore new methods
5. Reposition and adjust depth of vaginal penetration
6. Make use of tools (dilators and/or vibrators)
7. Practice self-care (healthy eating + exercise + sleep)

## **PART 6: Do's and Don'ts for Vaginal and Sexual Health:**

**Do** embrace your new you

**Do** welcome touch and intimacy with or without sex

**Do** proactively seek help if you need it

**Don't** smoke cigarettes (makes the skin less elastic)

**Don't** stop communicating with your partner

**Don't** give up on your sexual health, as a single person or as a couple – patience goes a long way