

Sexual Health for Men

Dana-Farber's Sexual Health Program helps men and women address questions and concerns about changes in sexual function and desire after cancer. It provides evaluation, education, treatment, and counseling for patients and their partners.

A quality of life issue

It is very common for cancer survivors to have some changes or problems with sexual functioning after treatment. Sometimes these problems are short-term; other challenges may be longer lasting. Because sexual function involves many dimensions including body, mind, behavior, and relationships, Dana-Farber's Sexual Health Program takes an integrative approach to care.

We believe that sexuality is an important quality-of-life issue. Sexual problems after cancer can negatively impact one's ability to enjoy life, and we encourage patients to take a step-by-step approach to finding ways to improve sexual activity after cancer.

Talk with your partner

Sexual partners of cancer survivors often have questions or concerns about sexual activity during or after cancer treatment. Some couples may find these changes hard to talk about.

- Approach the process of becoming intimate at a pace that's comfortable for both of you.
- Choose a moment when you're alone and relaxed, and dedicate some time for talking about recent changes in intimacy.
- Often partners aren't sure about how to start the conversation, and this topic can become the elephant in the room. Give yourselves permission to talk honestly and openly about your feelings, both good and bad, without judging them.

Tell your doctor what's going on

Survivors sometimes assume that sexual problems cannot be managed because doctors who treat cancer may not always bring up the topic. Fortunately, such issues are treatable and help is available.

- Questions about sexual health may be difficult to bring up with your doctor, but such concerns are normal and perfectly appropriate to discuss.
- Start by identifying your main concerns and questions. Write them down before your appointment, and try to be specific.
- Instead of saying "sex is a problem," offer a specific example, such as loss of desire or arousal or difficulty with erections. Your doctor or nurse can address your concerns and offer tips, or they can advise you about where to get support, such as from a sexual health professional.
- Many patients find it helpful to have an evaluation and consultation at a sexual health clinic that specializes in working with cancer patients and survivors.

Male sexual functioning problems

Erectile dysfunction: Difficulty getting and/or maintaining an erection.

Low libido: Little or no interest in sex.

Adult Survivorship Program

a member of the LIVESTRONG Survivorship Center of Excellence Network

Common causes of erectile dysfunction:

- Surgery (loss of blood flow to penis or nerve damage)
- Radiation therapy (damage to blood vessels, nerves, or penile tissue)
- Low testosterone (due to chemotherapy or hormone therapy)
- Medical conditions (high blood pressure, diabetes)
- Medications
- Alcohol, smoking, or recreational drugs

Common causes of low libido:

- Medications (some-antidepressants, blood pressure medications, or pain medications)
- Medical conditions (high blood pressure, diabetes)
- Low testosterone (due to cancer treatment or hormone therapy)
- Alcohol, smoking, or recreational drugs
- Fatigue
- Emotional concerns, stress, or depression
- Relationship problems
- Poor self-confidence or self-image (due to cancer treatment)

Treatment options include:

- Medications (Viagra, Levitra, Cialis)
- Vacuum devices
- Urethral suppositories
- Penile injections
- Penile prosthetics
- Psychosocial support and/or counseling
- Management of risk factors or potential causes

Online resources

- All About Sexual Health – www.livestrong.com/sexual-health
- EDCure – www.edcure.org

Next steps

Dana-Farber’s Sexual Health Program is open to all cancer patients and survivors, whether treated at Dana-Farber or elsewhere. It provides individual and couples counseling, referral and follow-up, and education for patients. To learn more, visit www.dana-farber.org/sexualhealth or contact a clinician in Dana-Farber’s Sexual Health Program at **617-632-4LAD (Life After Diagnosis)** or dfci_adultsurvivors@dfci.harvard.edu.

Our Sexual Health Program also works with the Men’s Sexual Health Clinic at Brigham and Women’s Hospital, which specializes in providing effective medical treatments for men with erectile dysfunction. To schedule an appointment, call **617-732-6325**. To learn more online, visit www.brighamandwomens.org and enter “men’s sexual health clinic” in the search box.

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