Intimacy and Sexuality after Breast Cancer

A breast cancer diagnosis disrupts many things in a woman’s life. There are emotional issues such as anxiety and stress. There also are physical changes that occur because of the treatments. Women may have fatigue, nausea, pain, numbness and tingling, swelling, and vaginal dryness. These will depend on the types of treatment. The active therapy for some women can last most of a year. Many women also take medicine for many years to decrease the risk of cancer coming back. All of these treatments and medicines can cause side effects. Given the toll of cancer and its treatments, it is no surprise that you may have changes in sexual interest. You may find it hard to get aroused and have an orgasm, worry about how your body looks after treatment, or have pain with intercourse. As with all the issues that you have on your journey with breast cancer, we want to help you manage your concerns.

Carbone Cancer Center Resources

- Lori Seaborne, MPAS, PA-C is a physician assistant working in the UW Health Breast Center Survivorship Program at UW Hospital. She completed sexual health training through the School of Social Work at the University of Michigan. She is certified as a sexuality counselor through the American Association of Sexuality Educators, Counselors, and Therapists (AASECT). She can talk with you about your sexual concerns after breast cancer. She will answer questions and help you access the right resources and the best care. Call 608-266-6400 to make an appointment.

- The Women’s Integrative Sexual Health (WISH) Program at the Carbone Cancer Center at UW Hospital. This is another choice for women who want a personal approach or who desire a thorough physical exam as part of their care. Lori Seaborne, MPAS, PA-C and Joanne Rash, PA-C (a PA in Gynecologic Oncology) work closely with your oncologist, pelvic floor physical therapists, and sex therapists. They use all available resources to address your concerns. If this is something that interests you, start by talking with Lori or your medical oncologist. They can make a referral for you.

There are several resources available in the library at the Breast Center. They are at both the UWHC and the 1 South Park locations. There are brochures you can have at no charge. There are also books that you can check out for up to a month. You may also find books at the Madison Public Library.

Brochures

- Intimacy and Sexuality from Living Beyond Breast Cancer
- Sexuality for the Woman with Cancer from the American Cancer Society

Books

- Intimacy After Cancer: a Woman’s Guide by Sally Kydd and Dana Rowett
- No Less A Woman: Femininity, Sexuality, and Breast Cancer by Deborah Hobler Kahane, MSW
- Woman, Cancer, Sex by Anne Katz, RN, PhD

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person’s health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright © 8/2015 University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing. HF#7759