

Intimacy and sexuality for women with gynaecological cancer - starting a conversation

If you need more information

There are a number of resources available that you and your partner can read. They might also help you think about other questions you would like to ask your treatment team.

Cancer Council NSW – Sexuality, Intimacy and Cancer*¹

<http://www.cancercouncil.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2010/10/Sexuality-Intimacy-and-Cancer.pdf>

Cancer Council Victoria – Sexuality and cancer*²

http://www.cancervic.org.au/downloads/brochures/cancer_types/Sexuality_cancer_08.pdf

Cancer Council Western Australia – Sexuality and Cancer CD set*

<http://www.cancerwa.asn.au/resources/publications/patients/tracks/#cancersexuality>

Ovarian Cancer Australia – Resilience

<http://www.ovariancancer.net.au/treatment-support/support-resources/resilience/>

National Comprehensive Cancer Network – Intimacy and Sexual Issues for Patients Undergoing Cancer Treatment

<http://www.nccn.com/component/content/article/61-symptoms/1517-intimacy-and-sexual-issues-in-cancer-patients.html>

*These resources can also be ordered from the Cancer Council Helpline on 13 11 20

Where do I go next? Where do I go for help?

If you don't feel comfortable talking to your treatment team at this time, or you want more information,

Cancer Council Helpline is a free, confidential telephone information and support service on 13 11 20.

If you need further help, there are a number of health professionals who may be able to assist you further, in addition to your current treatment team. These include health professionals who may have a special interest in sexuality such as a GP, psychologist, nurse, social worker, sexual health counsellor or physiotherapist. You may also be referred to a specialist psychosexual service or women's health service in your area.



References

¹ Cancer Council New South Wales 2011. Sexuality, Intimacy and Cancer, A guide for people with cancer, their families and friends. Sydney: Cancer Council New South Wales.

² Cancer Council Victoria 2010. Sexuality and cancer: for people with cancer, their family and friends. Melbourne: Cancer Council Victoria.

Acknowledgements

Sections of *Sexuality, Intimacy and Cancer (2011)* have been adapted with permission from Cancer Council NSW. Sections of *Sexuality and cancer (2010)* have been adapted with permission from Cancer Council Victoria.

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This resource has been developed to support women (and their partners) in understanding and addressing issues of intimacy and sexuality following the diagnosis and treatment of gynaecological cancer. It aims to empower women so they can ask questions that they may otherwise avoid asking due to embarrassment or other concerns. It also includes suggestions of where to go for information and support about issues of intimacy and sexuality.

Who is this resource for?

This resource is for all women, of any age, who have been diagnosed with gynaecological cancer whether single, with a partner, heterosexual or homosexual. It provides questions you and/or your partner may wish to ask health professionals on issues of sexuality and intimacy.



What is intimacy and sexuality?

The terms intimacy and sexuality have many meanings. They may also mean different things to different people. Intimacy can be expressed in different ways: by talking and listening on a personal level, by sharing a special place or a meaningful experience, or through physical affection. Some people associate sexuality with sexual intercourse.

For other people, sexuality means a range of things including who you are, how you feel about yourself, how you express yourself sexually and your sexual feelings for others.¹

Intimacy and sexuality for you and your partner are influenced by many factors apart from your cancer and treatment. These can include your cultural and religious beliefs, your age or life stage, sexual orientation, if you were in your relationship before you were diagnosed and the nature of that relationship.

The gynaecological cancer journey

A woman at any stage of her life can be diagnosed with gynaecological cancer. Everyone is different, but it is common for the diagnosis, treatment and the effects of gynaecological cancer to have an impact on your intimacy, sexuality and how you feel about your body, your femininity, relationships and other roles in your life. These changes and the emotional impact of a cancer diagnosis can be experienced at different stages of your cancer journey, both during and beyond treatment.

• At diagnosis

In the months before your diagnosis was made, there may have been some symptoms that affected your intimacy and sexuality. You may also have had issues related to intimacy and sexuality before your diagnosis that were influenced by factors other than your cancer.

• During treatment

Treatments such as surgery, radiotherapy, chemotherapy and other treatments can cause physical changes to your body and changes to how you feel about yourself and others close to you.

• After treatment

After finishing treatment, there are sometimes longer term effects of both the cancer itself and the treatments you have had.

