

Massachusetts General Hospital BMT Survivorship Program

Maintain Your Sexual Health During and After Bone Marrow Transplantation: *Men*

Key Messages:

- Cancer treatment and bone marrow transplantation can cause physical and emotional changes that affect a man's desire and ability to have sex.
- It is important to manage side effects that cause sexual problems. Please speak openly with your health care team about your sexuality and intimacy concerns, even before treatment starts, as there are ways to cope with these concerns.
- There are several ways you and your partner can get support for sexual concerns, including working with a sexual health expert, and talking to your doctor, social worker or a psychologist.

Ways to Enhance Sexuality:

Manage emotional issues and boost your self-esteem:

It is common to feel depressed or anxious following a cancer diagnosis and treatment with bone marrow transplant. Relieving emotional side effects is just as important for your sexual health as relieving physical side effects. You do not have to cope alone. Talking with a member of your treatment team can help. Your oncology social worker can help you form better ways to cope and refer you to community resources.

Some men struggle with body image after treatment. Issues like hair loss, weight gain, and effect of chronic graft-versus-host disease on skin and appearance are common. Working to boost your self-esteem with the help of a psychologist or social worker may help. Healthy eating and exercise may also help increase one's self-esteem.

Working with your doctor on managing skin graft-versus-host disease and other changes in your body can be very helpful to help you look and feel your best.

Changes from Treatment That Affect Sexual Health

You may experience the following changes as a result of your cancer treatment. You should talk with your treatment team about any questions you may have.

- Decrease or loss of sexual desire
- Inability to get or maintain an erection (erectile dysfunction)
- Ejaculation and orgasm problems including premature ejaculation, urinating during ejaculation, and not release semen during orgasm (dry ejaculation)
- Pain during sex
- Increased unpleasant sensation or numbness in the genitals

These problems can be due to many of the changes your body goes through during treatment including:

Physical Changes:

After bone marrow transplantation:

- Sex hormonal deficiencies leading to decreased desire and/or pleasure
- Fatigue/ weakness
- Hair loss
- Chronic graft-versus-host disease affecting the genital area
- Increased skin sensitivity in the genitals
- Problems with erection or ejaculations

Emotional Changes:

- Lack of sexual desire
- Decreased self-esteem
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Stress
- Fear of recurrence
- Sadness
- Changes in appearance that affects your body image

Managing physical side effects:

Relieving the physical side effects that influence your ability to have and enjoy sex is an important part of cancer care and treatment. Your doctor can give you information on management of tools, including:

Oral drugs: Drugs such as sildenafil (Viagra), tadalafil (Cialis), or vardenafil (Levitra), can help a man get and maintain an erection. There are many ways to dose and give these drugs, so talk to your doctor on what is the right treatment for you.

Hormonal treatment: For some men, chemotherapy can affect their body's production of testosterone. Low testosterone can lead to low sexual desire and pleasure. Testosterone can come in tablets, patches, or injections. Talk to your doctor to see whether taking testosterone supplements is right for you.

Penile Injections: Some men give themselves an injection of medicine into the penis with a small needle. This helps them to achieve an erection. This includes medications to increase blood flow to the penis, such as intraurethral alprostadil (Caverjet, Edex, or Muse) and intracavernous papaverine (sold under multiple brand names).

Penile Implants: A device that enables a man to have an erection is surgically placed inside the penis.

Vaccum constriction device: A small pump is placed over the penis to encourage blood flow and erection.

Genital treatment for chronic graft-versus host disease: Chronic graft-versus-host disease can cause dryness affecting the genital area. It can also cause scarring, skin sensitivity, and pain with penetration. There are treatments that can be applied to the genital area such as local steroids or other creams, which can help treat chronic graft-versus-host disease. Talk with your doctors to see if local treatment of chronic graft-versus-host disease is right for you.

Talk with your doctor about the potential risks and side effects before using any medication or device.

Resources

- The Mass General Oncology Sexual Health Clinic (Yawkey 9E) team can help to create a treatment plan that fits your needs and situation. Contact: Call 617-724-4800.
- American Association of Sexuality Educators, Counselors, and Therapists: Locate an expert: www.aasect.org/referral-directory
- LIVESTRONG Foundation: Male Sexual Health after Cancer www.livestrong.org/we-can-help/finishing-treatment/male-sexual-health-after-cancer
- OncoLink: Men's Guide to Sexuality During and After Cancer Treatment: www.oncolink.org/support
- National Cancer Institute: Facing Forward After Cancer Treatment www.cancer.gov/publications/patient-education/facing-forward
- American Cancer Society: <https://www.cancer.org/treatment/treatments-and-side-effects/physical-side-effects/fertility-and-sexual-side-effects.html>
- Cancer.Net
Dating, Sex and Reproduction
www.cancer.net/coping-and-emotions/sexual-and-reproductive-health

Dating and Intimacy after Cancer:
<http://www.cancer.net/coping-and-emotions/sexual-and-reproductive-health/dating-and-intimacy>