

Women's Sexual Health after Transplant

Celebrating a Second Chance at Life Survivorship Symposium

April 29 – May 5, 2023



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Learning Objectives:

- How diagnosis and treatment can impact sexual changes
- Common sexual changes after transplant
- Strategies to help with sexual changes
- Barriers for patient education on sexual changes

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Why aren't sexual side effects discussed prior to treatment?

- Focus on cancer treatment and saving your life
- Limited time during visits
- Health care professionals may feel uncomfortable
- Parents are often present for clinic visit
- Health care professionals may not have the answers, knowledge and/or who to refer for answers
- Focus on fertility rather than sexuality
- If healthcare professionals do not discuss, then patients may not feel comfortable to bring up

Goal: Sexual changes discussed along with other possible side-effects.

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Multiple Factors Impact Your Sexual Life (& each other) Biopsychosocial Model

- Cancer Treatment
 - Surgery
 - Chemotherapy
 - Radiation
- Other Medications
- Fatigue
- Pain

- Changes in Body-Image
- Relationship Factors
- Psychological Factors
 - Anxiety
 - Depression
 - Stress
- Cultural/Social/Religious

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What Causes Sexual Changes after Transplant?

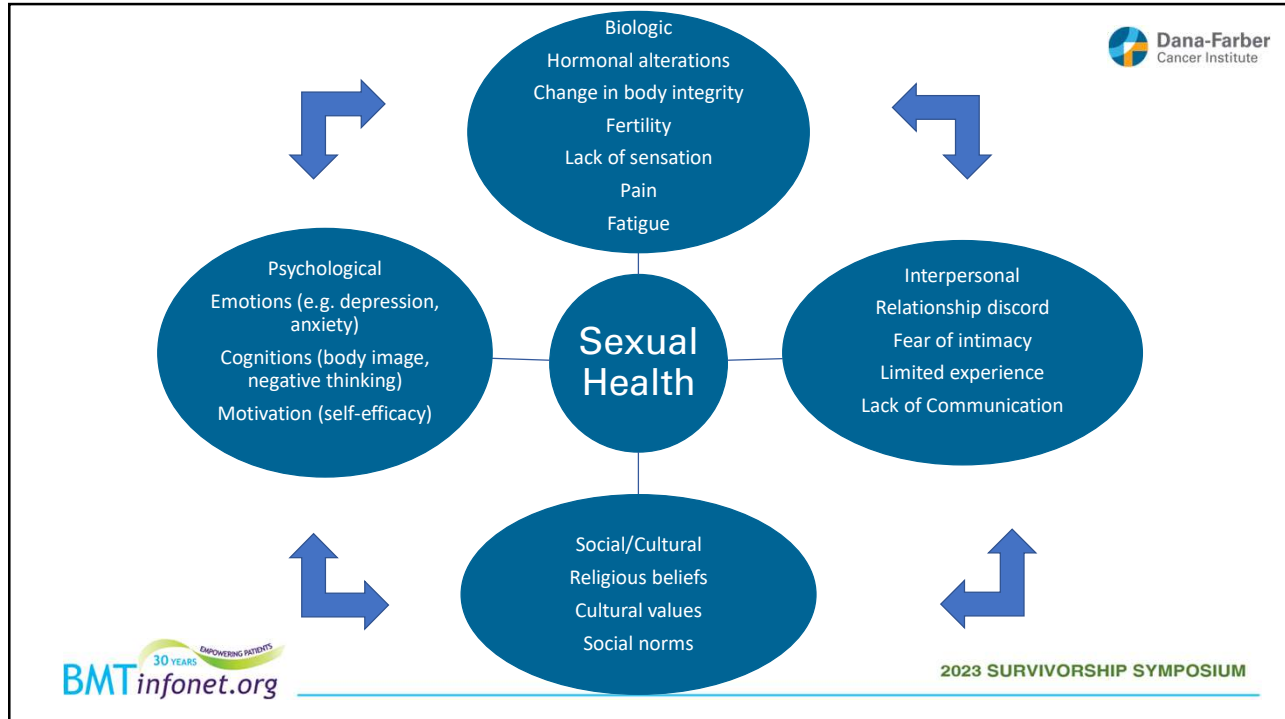
- Chemotherapy
- Graft-versus-Host Disease (GVHD) and it's treatment
- Genital GVHD
- Medications e.g., to treat GVHD, can cause physical changes, emotional lability
- Hormonal Changes-Premature Menopause

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Impact on Sexuality

- Transplant survivors, both men and women, often report changes with sexual life post transplant
- GVHD associated with less sexual satisfaction, more so if genital
- Genital GVHD:
 - vaginal dryness
 - Irritation
 - at times, ulceration
 - Narrowing of vaginal canal
- Changes in desire, arousal and orgasm
- Vaginal dryness, atrophy?

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Psychological and Sociocultural Factors Affecting Sexual Function

- Emotional Changes – anxiety and depression, at times may be due to hormonal changes
- Sleep- may be due to hot flashes
- Body-Image – hair loss, muscle changes, weight
- Changes in role and relationships
- Fatigue
- Cultural
- Religious/spiritual views/changes

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Starting With the Body....

Restore sexual health in concert with overall health and well-being

- Identify and address the “**Mechanics**”
 - Managing premature menopause
 - Addressing vaginal health as part of whole body health
- Address relevant **medical factors**
 - Fatigue, pain, changes in anatomy/mobility and sensations
- Embracing **lifestyle and behavior changes**
 - e.g., diet, exercise



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Premature Menopause

Decrease in estrogen and testosterone levels:

- Genito-urinary symptoms which impact sexual health
- Menopause can be temporary or permanent
- Vaginal Dryness/Pain/Tightness, Reduced Elasticity, Change in blood flow and sensation
- Hot Flashes
- Changes in Mood
- Fatigue
- Sleep Difficulties
- Chemobrain
- Decreased libido (sexual desire). There is more to sexual desire than just hormones




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If You Have Premature Menopause...

- Check hormone levels
- Hormone therapy can start soon after transplant
- Vaginal changes due to premature menopause can be like genital GVHD, but treatment is very different




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Post-Transplant Vaginal Changes

- Dryness – moisturize
- Reduced elasticity – stretch
- Change in sensation – focus on sensation



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Vaginal Health - Moisturize

Treating Vaginal Dryness – Two Steps Step One:

- Vaginal moisturizer every other night before bed.
- Moisturizers – water based, glycerin-free, e.g.
 - Replens, Revaree
- Vaginal moisturizer – local hormonal e.g.
 - Estrace - vaginal cream
 - Vagifem - vaginal inserts
 - Intrarosaa - vaginal inserts plant-derived DHEA
 - Discuss with oncologist



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Vaginal Health - Moisturize

Step Two:

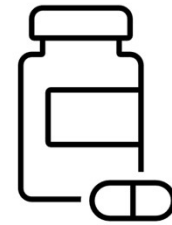
- Lubricant – when sexually active
- Examples:
- Astroglide
- K-Y Jelly
- Good Clean Love
- Suppositories (Lubrin)



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If Vaginal Dryness or Pain....

- Check medications – allergy meds
- Avoid douches
- Avoid feminine hygiene sprays
- Avoid perfumed soaps
- Deodorant panty liners



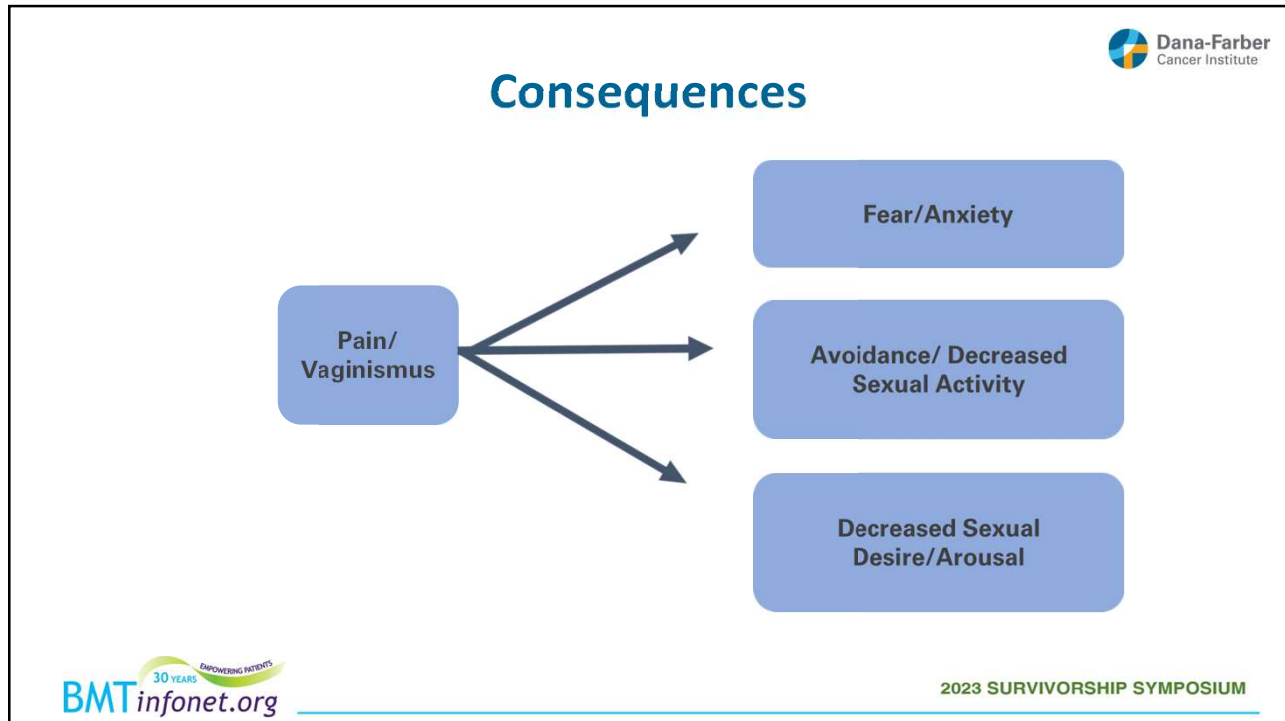
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Pelvic Floor Exercises - Stretch


- See a physical therapist who specializes in pelvic floor physical therapy.
 - Find a provider at [PelvicRehab.com](https://www.PelvicRehab.com) or consult your gynecologist
- Dilators
 - How to use: [mskcc.org/cancer-care/patient-education/how-use-vaginal-dilator](https://www.mskcc.org/cancer-care/patient-education/how-use-vaginal-dilator)



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Sexuality after Transplant - Single

- Dating
- When to tell about cancer/transplant history
- How to tell/communicate

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Enhancing Your Sexuality and Intimacy (Desire)



- Cultivate Desire and Intimacy (not automatic)
 - Communicate with your partner
 - Focus on pleasure (rather than goal focused)
 - Make time for intimacy
 - No matter what, most people enjoy being touched
 - Hold hands, massage
 - Keep a “desire diary”
 - Sexual triggers



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Enhancing Your Sexuality and Intimacy (Desire)



- Give yourself time to get in the mood
 - Watch an erotic movie
 - Read erotic literature
 - Listen to music, dance, kiss
 - Relax, take a shower or tub bath together
- Gentle touching, extra time for foreplay
- Limit touching, if painful (communicate)



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Enhancing Your Sexuality and Intimacy

- Try to keep an open mind about ways to feel sexual pleasure/positions/experiment
- Self-stimulation
- Acupuncture?
- Herbal?
- Medications? New Medications?
- Have fun, explore!



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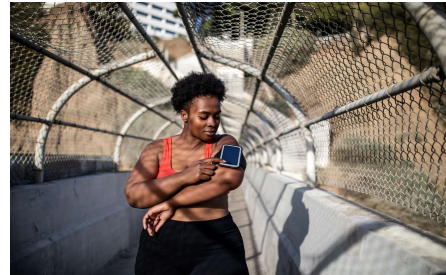
How to Treat Sexual Changes after Transplant: Team Approach

- Sexual Health Evaluation and Education pre-transplant and post-transplant
- Hormone Evaluation pre-transplant and post-transplant
- Hormone therapy – when indicated
- Topical and other medication treatment when indicated
- Sexual health and cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT)
- Couples counseling

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Sexual Health is Part of a Healthy Life

- Acknowledge changes - loss
- Explore ways to cope with changes
- Explore ways to find comfort with changes in body and body-image
 - Self-talk
 - Appreciate your body
 - Clothes
- **Get active and moving – exercise**
- Mood – anxiety
- Get sleep, eat properly
- Keep sex in perspective



Sexual Health National Resources

- American Association of Sexual Educators, Counselors and Therapists (aasect.org)
- Society for Sex Therapy and Research (sstarnet.org)
- International Society of the Study of Women's Health (ISSWSH)
- LIVESTRONG (livestrong.org)
- American Cancer Society (cancer.org)
- American Psychosocial Oncology Society (apos-society.org)

Thank You!

Contact us!

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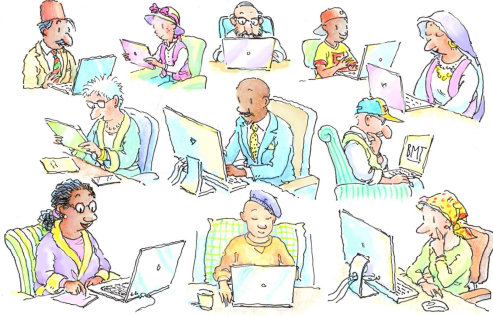


QUESTIONS?



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Phone: 888-597-7674 or 847-433-3313