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
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.**

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
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

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?
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
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

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
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

Post-Transplant Vaginal Changes

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

Step Two:

• Lubricant – when sexually active
• Examples:
  • Astroglide
  • K-Y Jelly
  • Good Clean Love
  • Suppositories (Lubrin)
If Vaginal Dryness or Pain....

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

Pelvic Floor Exercises - Stretch

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

- Pain/Vaginismus
- Fear/Anxiety
- Avoidance/Decreased Sexual Activity
- Decreased Sexual Desire/Arousal

Sexuality after Transplant - Single

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

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)
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!

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
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](http://aasect.org))
- Society for Sex Therapy and Research ([sstarnet.org](http://sstarnet.org))
- International Society of the Study of Women’s Health (ISSWSH)
- LIVESTRONG ([livestrong.org](http://livestrong.org))
- American Cancer Society ([cancer.org](http://cancer.org))
- American Psychosocial Oncology Society ([apos-society.org](http://apos-society.org))
Thank You!

Contact us!

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QUESTIONS?

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LET US KNOW HOW WE CAN HELP YOU

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