



Women's Sexual Health after Transplant

Celebrating a Second Chance at Life Survivorship Symposium

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Women's Sexual Health After Transplant

2021 Celebrating a Second Chance at Life BMT InfoNet Survivorship Symposium

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Presentation

- What are some of the sexual difficulties women encounter after transplant?
- How frequently do sexual difficulties occur?
- How do sexual difficulties impact quality of life?
- What are the causes and risk factors for sexual difficulties?
- What are some strategies to address sexual difficulties?

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It's Not Just About Sex.....

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Is Sexuality Important?

- Altered sexuality negatively affects the quality of life of the transplant survivor **AND** intimate partner
1. Affect on family / partner
 2. Loss of hair
 3. Fatigue
 4. Affect on role responsibilities
 5. Affects on social activities
 6. Loss of sexual feelings

Carelle, N et. Al (2002) *Cancer*, 95:155

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Causes of Sexual Difficulties

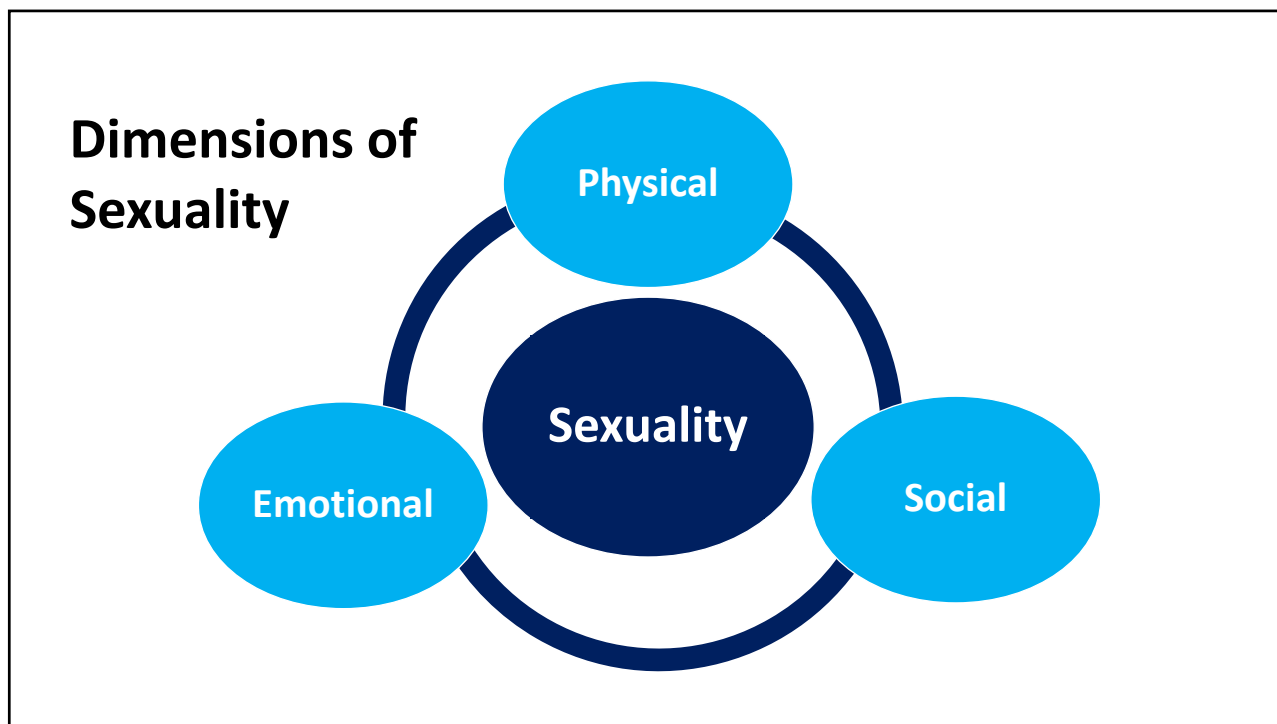
- The cancer
- Emotional distress associated with the diagnosis and treatment for survivor **and** partner
- Cancer treatment
- Side effects and complications of treatment
- Alterations in relationships during and following treatment

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Types of Sexual Difficulties

Sexual Problem	Frequency
Loss of Interest	51 – 60%
Painful sexual intercourse	33 – 76%
Arousal difficulties	11 – 52%
Difficulty with orgasm	42 – 47%
Decrease in sexual activity	57 – 68%
Sexual dissatisfaction	22 – 52%

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Physical Dimension of Sexuality

- Menopause
- Vaginal Alterations
 - Menopause
 - Radiation
 - Chronic Graft Versus Host Disease
- Fatigue
- Changes in appearance
- Medications

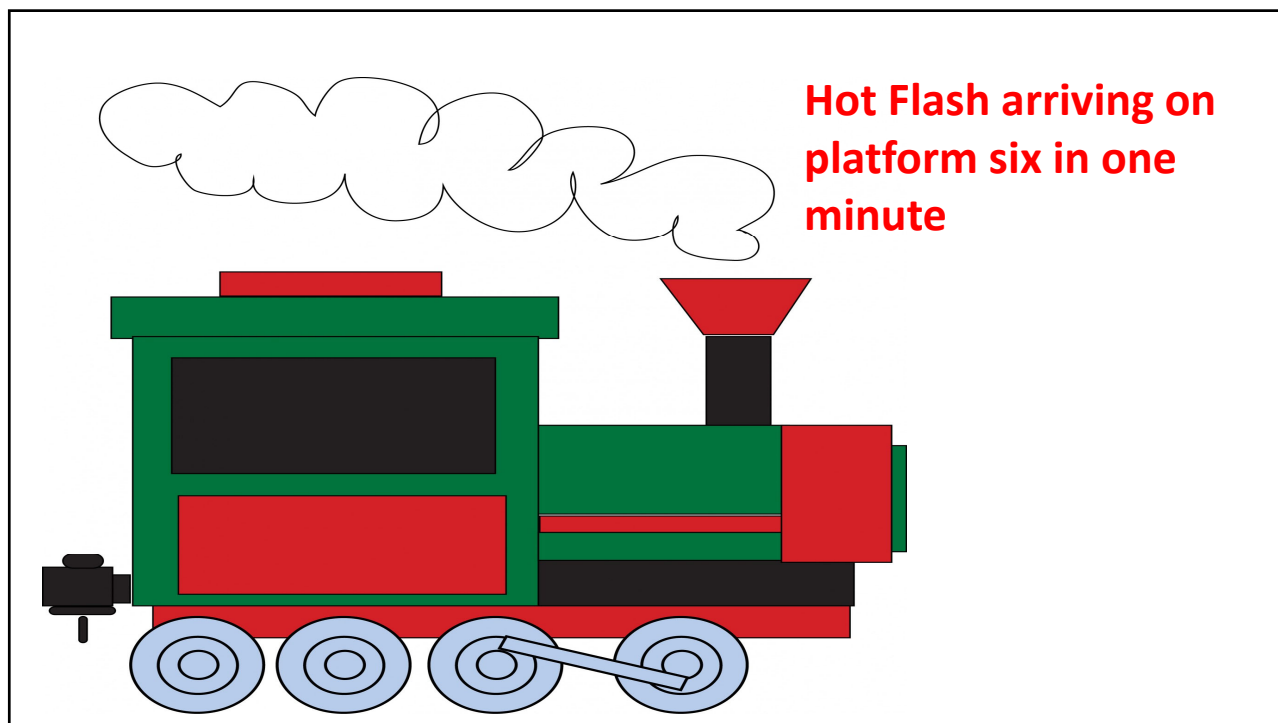
A pink female symbol icon, consisting of a circle with a vertical line and a horizontal crossbar, is positioned to the right of the list.

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Symptoms of Menopause

- Hot flashes / night sweats
- Vaginal changes
 - dryness
 - loss of elasticity
 - increased risk of infections
- Trouble sleeping
- Mood swings
- Depression
- Changes in appearance
- Osteoporosis / bone loss

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Emotional Dimension of Sexuality



- Depression and anxiety
- Body image changes
 - Decreases self-confidence and self-esteem
- Menopause
 - Loss of youth and femininity
- Infertility

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Social Dimension of Sexuality




- Intimate partner
 - emotional distress
 - sexual health
- Role changes
 - **Lover** ↔ **Caregiver**
 - **Lover** ↔ **Patient**
- Distress in relationships often leads to sexual problems

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Caregiver Distress

- Caregivers experienced
 - Less social support
 - More loneliness
 - Less marital satisfaction
 - Less spiritual well-being
 - Less post-traumatic growth
- Spousal caregivers had a decline in marital satisfactions scores one-year after transplant while transplant survivors had stable scores



Bishop, MM et al (2007) [J Clin Oncology](#), 25:1403
Langer, S., et al. (2003) [Psycho-Oncology](#), 12:239

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OMG


Did my patient just ask me about sex?

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Challenges in Addressing Sexual Health

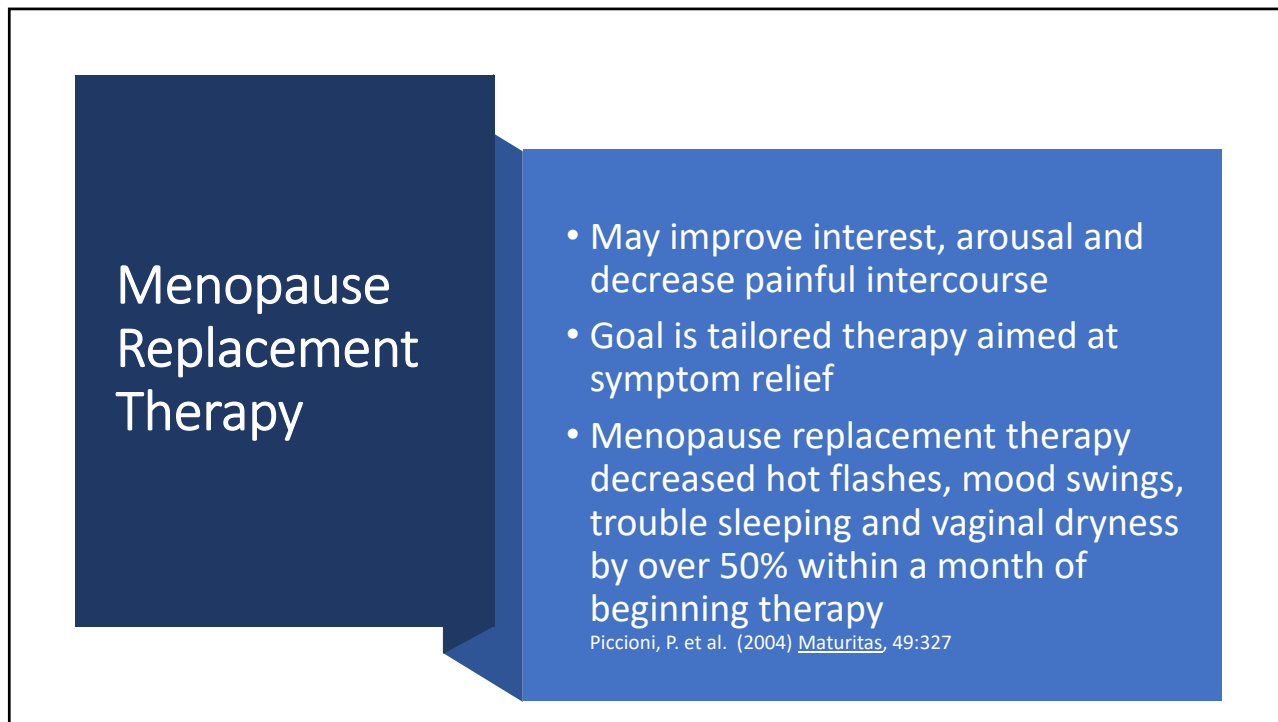
- **No**
 - Established guidelines as to what sexual activities are safe / unsafe
 - Systematic approach to assessing sexual health
 - Well researched interventions
- **Limited**
 - Guidance on when survivors may engage in sexual activity
 - Network of healthcare providers to provide expertise, support, guidance and therapeutic interventions

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Healthcare Providers	Transplant Survivors	Intimate Partner / Couple
Personal discomfort	Fear being dismissed	Difficulty establishing or re-establishing intimacy
Lack of education	Fear making healthcare provider uncomfortable	Difficulty communicating
Limited Time	Fear there are no treatment options	Fear of rejection

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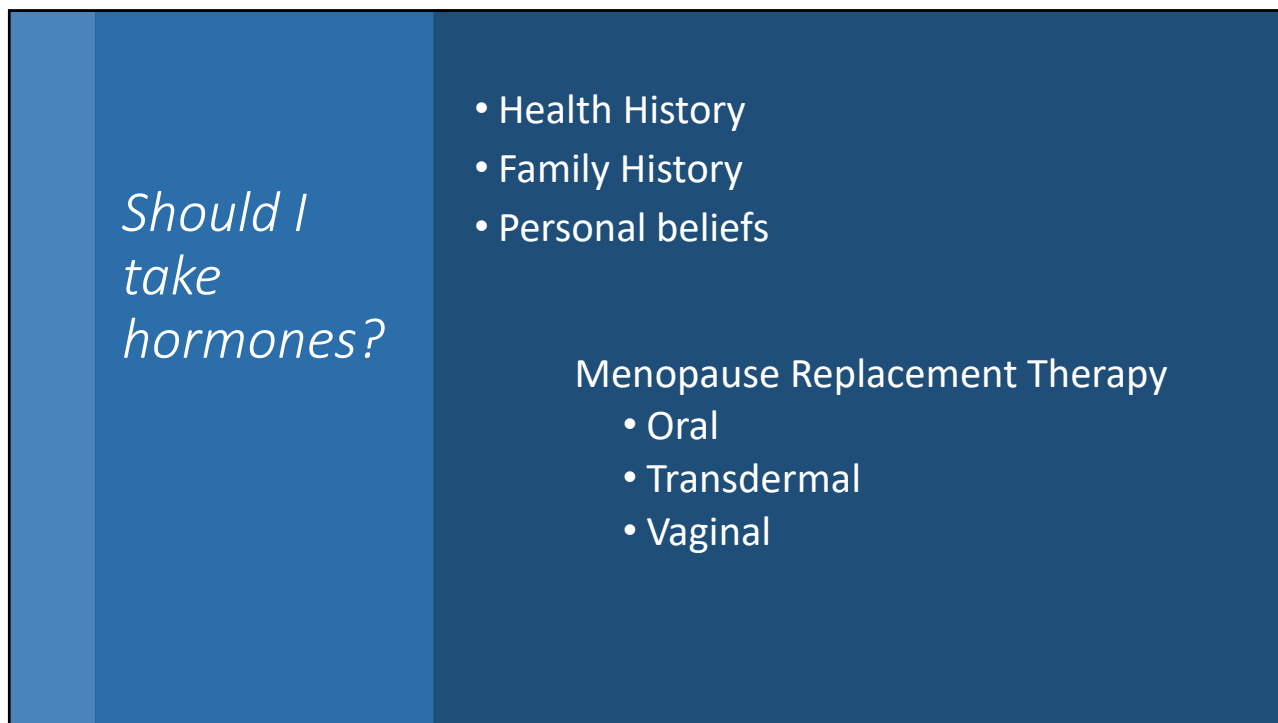


Menopause Replacement Therapy

- May improve interest, arousal and decrease painful intercourse
- Goal is tailored therapy aimed at symptom relief
- Menopause replacement therapy decreased hot flashes, mood swings, trouble sleeping and vaginal dryness by over 50% within a month of beginning therapy

Piccioni, P. et al. (2004) *Maturitas*, 49:327

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Should I take hormones?

- Health History
- Family History
- Personal beliefs

Menopause Replacement Therapy

- Oral
- Transdermal
- Vaginal

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Non-Hormonal Therapy for Hot Flashes

- Antidepressants
- Anticonvulsants
- Anticholinergics
- Progestins
- Vitamin E
- Soy
- Black cohosh
- Homeopathy
- Dietary changes
- Relaxation training
- Exercise
- Acupuncture
- Reflexology

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Androgen Therapy

- Androgen therapy may improve sexual functioning
 - No androgen therapies are FDA approved for treating female sexual problems
- Dehydroepiandrosterone (DHEA)
 - stimulate local tissue synthesis of estrogen and testosterone without increasing blood levels

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Vaginal Dryness and Painful Intercourse

- Menopause replacement therapy
- Ospemifene (Osphena®)
 - Non-estrogen oral pill
- Prolong foreplay
- Assume a position that allows you to control rate and depth of penetration
- Non-penetrative sexual activity
- Explore other body parts

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Vaginal Dryness and Painful Intercourse

- Vaginal moisturizers used to improve vaginal tissue health
 - Hyaluronic acid-based gel (Hyalofemme®)
 - Estriol based cream (Ovestin®)
 - Replens®
- Vaginal lubricants are intended for use during sexual activity to reduce pain and irritation
 - Water or silicone based
 - Pure oils (olive oil or coconut oil)

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Gwyneth Paltrow Is Selling Vibrators

“So many vibrators look hypersexualized,” said Gwyneth Paltrow, seen here at the Goop offices.



Credit...Alex Welsh for The New York Times

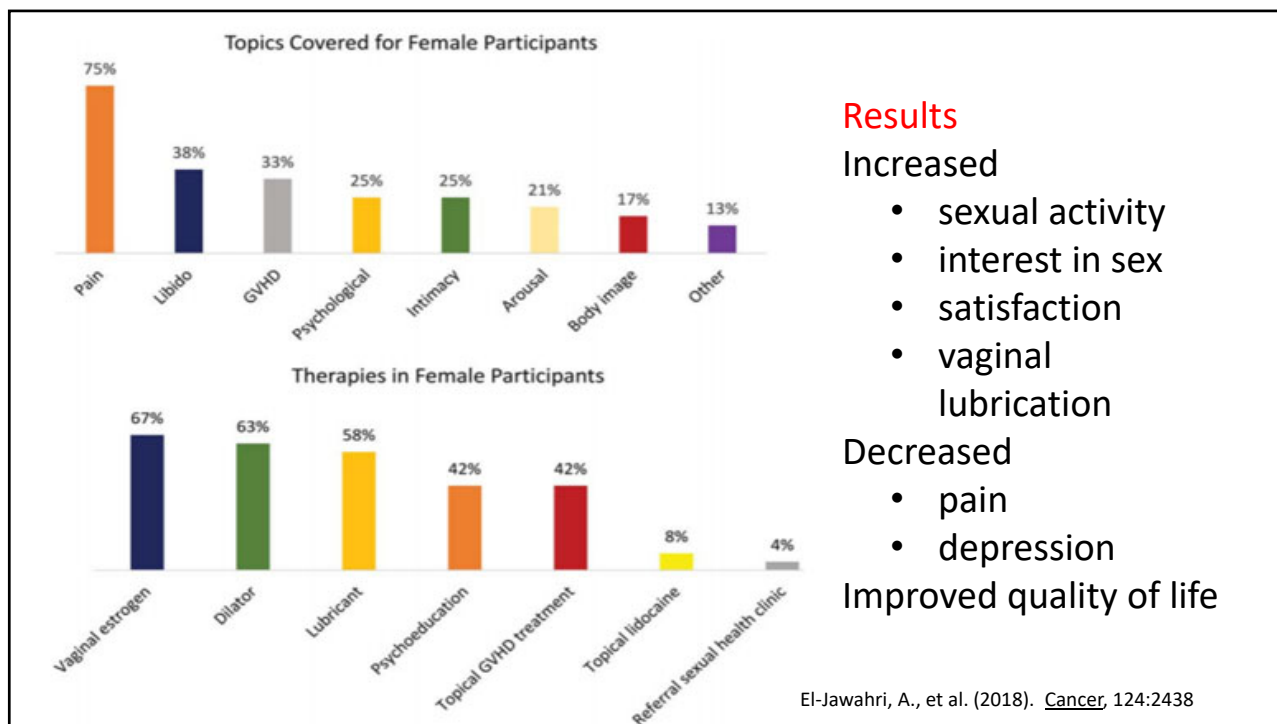
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Vaginal Chronic Graft Versus Host Disease

- Prevention
 - Topical estrogen
 - Early initiation of menopause replacement hormones
 - Vaginal dilatation in the absence of sexual activity
- Treatment
 - Topical steroids
 - Topical cyclosporine
 - Vaginal dilatation

Zantomio, D et al (2006) BMI, 38:567

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Sensate Focus Exercises

- Touching exercises
- Goal is to establish intimacy
- Full body touching every 2-3 days with hands and fingers only
 - Initially no touching of chest or genitals
- No talking
- Intimacy can reduce emotional distress and facility recover

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Is Emily Morse the Dr. Ruth of a new generation?

- Radio Show, Podcast, Master Class
- Her focus is to remove the stigma about sex
- “The more we talk about sex the better sex we are going to have”



Credit: Béatrice de Géa for the New York Times

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Psychoeducation Therapies

- Improvements in sexual functioning and quality of life have been demonstrated with:
 - Mind- body interventions
 - Cognitive behavioral therapy
 - Couples based interventions and counseling
 - On-line formats to address sexuality and relationship issues

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In summary

- Be empowered to talk with your healthcare provider
 - Ask for guidance on sexual activity
 - Ask for a referral
- Alterations in sexual health may be physical, emotional or social
- Treatment options are available
- Effective treatment is a combination of education, support and symptom management

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Predictors of Healthy Sexual Adjustment

- Good relationship before transplant
- Satisfying sexual relationship before transplant
- A partner who desires sex
- Support from partner

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Resources

- BMT InfoNet
- American Cancer Society
- Leukemia and Lymphoma Society
- Be The Match
- American Association of Sex Educators, Counselors and Therapists
- CancerCare
- Oncolink
- CancerConnect
- National Coalition for Cancer Survivorship
- and there are many more.....

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Questions?

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