

# Sexual Recovery

The Emotional Work



## **IT'S NORMAL TO HAVE A LOT OF DIFFERENT FEELINGS ABOUT SEX AND INTIMACY AFTER PROSTATE CANCER TREATMENT.**

Getting your sex life back on track will require both physical and emotional work.

You and your partner may feel a sense of grief because the familiar ways of interacting and experiencing sex have changed.

## **Grief is part of recovery**

Feeling grief, especially when your sex life changes, is completely normal. Both those diagnosed with prostate cancer and their partners can feel upset. It's all part of the recovery process.

### **You may find that you have:**

- Mood swings
- Crying spells
- A shorter fuse

### **You may feel:**

- Shocked
- Sad
- Angry
- Frustrated
- Hopeless
- Scared of what the future will bring
- Hopeful that things will work out, even if they're not the same

These are all emotions that people feel when they're grieving. We usually think about grief when someone dies, but losing something that is familiar, like usual sexual interactions, can make one feel those feelings, too.

## **PARTNERS FEEL GRIEF TOO**

**Partners can also feel grief, but those feelings may differ from the the person diagnosed with prostate cancer feelings:**

- Partners may worry about how the sexual changes will affect them and their pleasure during sex.
- Partners might be unsure about how they should help with the sexual recovery.

**Even with preparation, couples can suddenly feel less confident:**

- If there were relationship or sexual problems before, coping with sexual changes after prostate cancer treatment can be challenging.
- Both members of a couple might grieve with different timing. Even if you're not always "on the same page", you can still support one another through the process.

# How do you work through grief?

## FEELING GRIEF DURING SEX

While you're working on staying sexually connected, you may be distracted by thoughts about how sex used to be, by sadness about the changes, and by worries about whether you or your partner will be able to enjoy making love again. Those thoughts and feelings are part of grief and will get better as you learn to make love with more confidence.

### Communication is vital.

Many people don't talk during sex or about their sexual relationship. Yet now, more than ever, it's important to talk about sex and about how you'll manage the changes. Couples sometimes avoid talking about their feelings because they're overwhelmed or trying not to burden one another. Research shows that when people don't let each other know what they're going through, it hurts their relationships.

### Not talking can lead to:

- Avoiding sex.
- Starting to feel distant from each other.
- Losing emotional closeness.
- Decrease in confidence.
- Depression.

### What can talking do:

Talking about sexual changes can ease the grieving process and bring you closer.

If you're already good at communicating about sex, keep talking openly with each other. If you have not been in the habit of talking about sex and are not sure about how to start, you may find it helpful to work with a sex therapist to help you get more comfortable.

### Stay active.

Whether it's hobbies, fixing things around the house, or getting together with friends – get back to doing the things you love.

### Patience is key.

Recovering from prostate cancer treatment and adjusting to the changes takes time. Understanding what to expect and accepting the process will help you feel more in charge.

With time, the feelings of grief will become less intense. Here are some reasons:

- You'll know how your body works and reacts.
- You'll know what to do to get the most pleasure.
- You and your partner will have a better sense of how you work together.
- You'll feel more competent as a lover and partner.

Remind each other to be patient because the process of recovery takes time and frustration makes it harder.

### Get support.

If you're having a hard time managing your feelings, talk to your healthcare provider. They can help you find a therapist or counselor who will understand your needs. You can also find a qualified sex therapist in your area. Remember, many men and their partners are on this same journey with you. Don't be afraid to reach out to your doctor, counselor, nurse or social worker.

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