

Sexual Adaptation Process

A prostate cancer diagnosis can be a life changing experience. Following the diagnosis another journey begins, which includes testing, decision making, treatment, as well as the management of the various side-effects of treatment. The sexual consequences can affect erections, ejaculation, orgasm, genital sensation, sexual drive and/or continence. These side-effects can impact sexual self-view, which includes body image and masculinity, leading to a potential loss of sexual confidence, and subsequently, a disruption in sexual intimacy for individuals and couples.

The process of sexual adaptation following prostate cancer treatment is complex and warrants the need to apply the principles of acceptance, flexibility, patience and persistence. This process helps individuals move forward in discovering new ways of being sexual, along with redefining one's sexual self-view and corresponding sexual values.

Acceptance

This has many meanings and levels for individuals, and can take a long time. Usually it involves recognizing what is lost and going through a grieving process. This may be done on your own, with a partner, and/or with help from a counsellor.

Flexibility

This focuses on being open minded. Many individuals or couples may have learned a pattern on how to be sexual. There is nothing wrong with having a pattern. Why change something that is familiar, comfortable and provides pleasure? The sexual side-effects of prostate cancer can disrupt your sexual pattern BUT can also create opportunities to explore other ways of being sexual. Sometimes it is important to understand your values around things like sexual aids (i.e. PDE5 inhibitors, vacuum devices, penile injections), sexual toys (lubricants, tension bands, vibrators) and sexual practices (Sensate Focus, Tantric Sex) to determine whether your values will hinder or foster your sexual explorations.

Patience

This is a valuable life skill. Having patience provides us with direct control of ourselves. A lack of success or progress can almost always be boiled down to a lack of patience. Think about when you learned how to ride a bike; it more than likely took a lot of time and patience before having success with riding.

Persistence

“Success is the result of perfection, hard work, learning from failure, loyalty, and persistence”. In this quote, Colin Powell talks about the other factors that are just as important as persistence in achieving success. Success with the sexual adaptation process takes the time to develop, which means you will go through trials and errors along the way.

The sexual adaptation process includes penile and sexual rehabilitation. A person may focus on one or both types of rehabilitation.

Penile Rehabilitation

This consists of purposeful action to keep the erectile tissue in the penis healthy during the recovery period. Just like our bodies, if we do not exercise on a regular basis then our bodies will become weak and de-conditioned. If the penis is not exercised regularly, the erectile tissue will decrease, and the ability to create and maintain erections will decline.

Sexual Rehabilitation

This focuses on elements to help the individual and/or couple with the sexual adaptation process. It can include gaining knowledge (understanding orgasm), developing coping & communication skills (dealing with feelings of sexual inadequacy, learning how to talk to your partner about sex), understanding how societal myths around sexuality might influence personal values, adjusting values and beliefs to help support sexual self-view (including body image and masculinity/femininity) and discovering new ways of supporting desired sexual activities and/or behaviors.

The sexual adaptation process can take years, but our team is here to support and guide you as needed.

Remember you are still a sexual person.
Your sexual life is your own and it is you (and your partner)
who should decide what is important and comfortable.

