Making Adjustments

Cancer doesn't have to bring sexual intimacy to an end.

March 4, 2019 By Kate Ferguson

Sex may be the last thing on a person's mind after a cancer diagnosis. But once the initial shock wears off and treatment commences, questions may arise about how soon patients can resume intimate activities.

Any type of experience with cancer can affect a person's body image, emotions and relationships, experts explain, and all these factors significantly impact what individuals—and their significant others—think about sexuality.

In findings presented at the 2015 annual meeting of the American Society of Clinical Oncology, researchers found that younger patients diagnosed with ovarian or cervical cancer who received chemotherapy and were in committed relationships were at a high risk of sexual dysfunction. As a result, the scientists concluded that doctors ought to provide people with information about the possible changes cancer treatment could have on their sex life.

But if a physician doesn't initiate this conversation, individuals should take charge and broach the subject. Folks should start by talking with their cancer specialist, experts suggest. The next step for patients is to visit either a clinical psychologist or sexual therapist to solicit support and advice about ways to continue being intimate in the face of a diminished sex drive, erectile issues, vaginal dryness or other difficulties related to cancer treatment.

The good news is that many of these problems are temporary and generally improve once cancer therapy ends.

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