

Sexual Recovery

Women's Sexual Response

Men who are treated for prostate cancer often have female partners who are either going through or are already in menopause. Menopause can impact woman's sexual response in several ways.

Like the man, a woman may need to make adjustments or try different sexual aids to continue to have a satisfying and comfortable sex life.

Desire and/or Arousal

For many women, interest in sex is not just about a physical response. Before deciding to have sex, women check in with themselves and ask:

- Do I feel close to my partner right now?
- Does this feel like the right time? Do I feel comfortable?

Desire may not always be spontaneous, but can also be a feeling that is cultivated. For example, the feeling of desire may grow stronger after a woman begins engaging in a romantic or physical experience that feels safe and pleasurable. In other words, feeling close to a partner and experiencing pleasure and intimacy can help build desire even when desire is not spontaneous.

With sexual stimulation or pleasure:

- The heart starts pumping a bit faster
- Blood pressure goes a bit higher
- Breathing gets heavier
- Blood begins to flow to sexually sensitive areas of the body
- The vagina lubricates and the clitoris swells

What changes after menopause?

Especially after menopause when women lose the hormone estrogen, they may have:

- Lower sex drive
- Less spontaneous desire for sex
- Vaginal dryness that can lead to pain during penetration
- Less sensitivity in the vagina, but the clitoris and the G-spot will likely still be sensitive

Orgasm

Sexual tension is released

- Muscles in the pelvic floor contract or spasm
- Women feel intense vaginal or uterine contractions and intense pleasure

What changes after menopause?

- Women typically are still be able to have orgasms, but may need more stimulation
- Women have difficulty with orgasm after menopause for many reasons, including poor blood flow into the clitoris due to health conditions and medications

Resolution / Refractory Period

After orgasm, the body relaxes

- Muscles relax, blood pressure drops, there is a feeling of satisfaction and wellbeing
- If the orgasm is experienced with a partner, couples often feel relaxed and connected
- Women may be able to have multiple orgasms
- Unlike men, women usually can have another orgasm soon after the first.

What changes after menopause?

- Women who have multiple orgasms before menopause can usually still have them

Coping with sexual changes of menopause

After menopause, women have major changes in their vaginal health that can lead to pain during sex. This can impact desire to have sex.

Sexual aids are helpful for many women. They include:

- **Vaginal moisturizers:** help restore moisture and decrease vaginal dryness over time. Moisturizers can be used 3-4 times a week or as needed.
- **Lubricants:** help reduce pain during sexual activity.
- **Vibrators:** generate blood flow that increases sexual pleasure and improves vaginal health.
- **Vaginal dilators:** restore stretch to genital tissue and help women learn to relax pelvic floor muscles to make intercourse more comfortable.
- **Topical hormone replacement:** (by prescription from a gynecologist or family physician) is designed to help with moisturizing vaginal walls.
- **Pelvic floor rehabilitation:** Helps women regain capacity to both strengthen and relax pelvic floor muscles as needed.

Talk to your healthcare provider about who can help you find the right sexual aid for your situation or refer you to a sex therapist, a gynecologist or to a physical therapist who specializes in pelvic floor rehabilitation.

Couples may also need to adjust their sexual practices. More foreplay, different sex positions, use of lubricants and vibrators, and open communication about what feels good can help.

