

Sexual Recovery

Coping with Sexual Side Effects: Heterosexual Men



It is still possible to enjoy sex after prostate cancer treatment.

Prostate cancer brings sexual changes and challenges that impact men and their relationships. However, there are things you can do to cope. It's possible to still enjoy sex, even after prostate cancer treatment.

All these changes may cause you to feel less satisfied with sex. You may also feel a sense of loss and grief. This is normal. Help is available through medical treatment and support from professionals.

What Changes Might Affect You?

Here are some sexual changes that impact many men after treatment for prostate cancer:

Erection changes

Most prostate cancer treatments lead to problems with erections, at least temporarily. Erection aids (see below) may help.

- After surgery, your erections will be weak right away. This may improve over the next few years.
- After radiation, erection gradually become less firm. This can happen even years after treatment.
- After hormone treatment, erections become weaker. This can go away after treatment is done, but may be long-term if your treatment is ongoing.

Changes in Sex Drive

- Prostate cancer treatments can cause men to feel a loss of energy and sense of fatigue. This can impact interest and energy for sexual activity.
- Hormone treatment lowers testosterone levels and this also lowers sex drive.

Changes in Orgasm

- Men who have surgery to remove the prostate will have “dry orgasms” (no longer ejaculate).
- Men who have radiation will ejaculate a smaller amount.
- After hormone treatment, some men have trouble reaching orgasm, have less sensitivity of the penis and find orgasms to be less intense.
- After surgery or radiation, you may leak urine during sex. This will not hurt your partner.

Genital Shrinkage

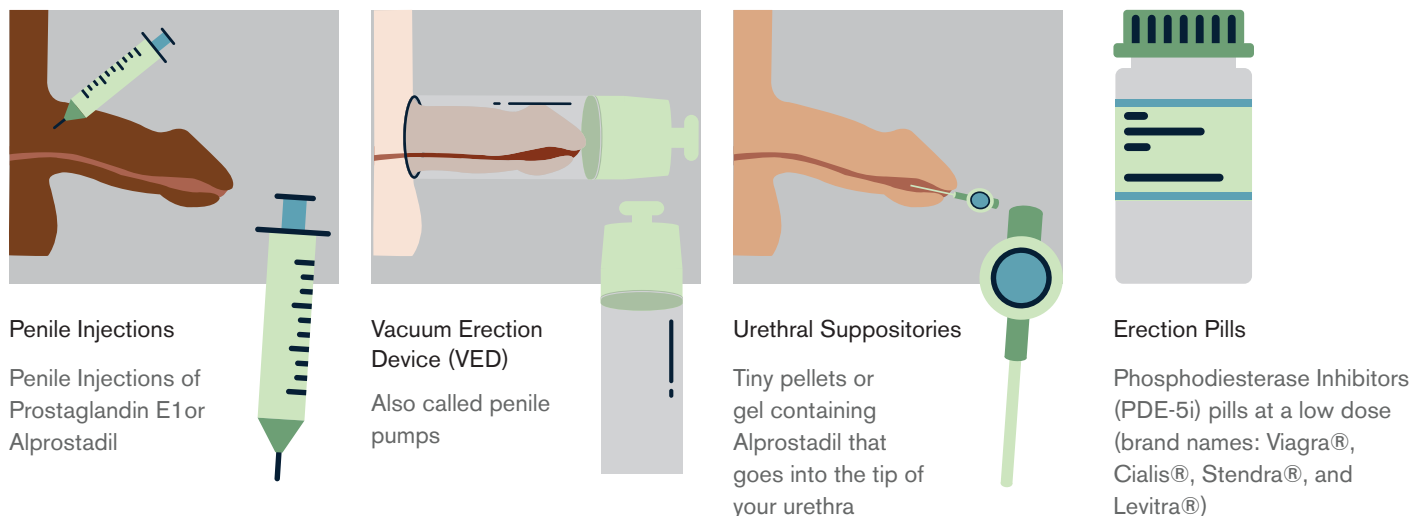
Genital size is important to many men.

- If you have hormone treatment for prostate cancer, you may notice that your testicles or penis get smaller.
- After surgery, you may notice your penis is a bit shorter. This may be limited with rehabilitation.



Center for
Health
Communications
Research

Fig 1. Erection Aids



Coping with Changes

With all the sexual changes and challenges of prostate cancer treatment, it's important to find ways to cope that work for you and your partner. Here are some coping methods other men have found useful:

Be Willing to Experiment

- You may need to adapt and expand your sexual repertoire to cope with the changes after prostate cancer.
- Experiment with non-penetrative sexual activities using your hands, mouth, vibrators, sex toys, etc.
- Masturbation, alone or with each other, can provide sexual pleasure for both you and your partner.

Talk About It

- When there are changes in your sexual relationship, talking is even more important than usual. Be open and honest with each other about your fears, needs, and feelings.
- A sex therapist may also help you work through any communication issues.

Plan Ahead

- Planning or scheduling sex can help, especially if you're using aids like medicine or a pump to get an erection.
- Make a date with your partner and plan it when you're well rested and have plenty of time for sex.

Focus on Intimacy

- Find ways to stay close even when sex or penetration are not possible. Intimacy can be simply laying naked together or talking.
- Hugging, cuddling, holding hands, and kissing can help you stay connected with your partner.

Find Support

- A sex therapist can offer support for you and your partner. To find a sex therapist in your area, visit the website of the American Association of Certified Sexuality Educators, Counselors and Therapists.

Try Erection Aids (Figure 1)

- Erection aids may be able to help you create an erection if you're not able to get one naturally.
- Talk to your doctor for more information, or check out our information sheets on:
 - Erection pills
 - Penile injections
 - Urethral suppositories
 - Vacuum erection devices (VED)

Explore Penile Rehabilitation

- Erection aids can also be used for penile rehabilitation. Penile rehab may help keep the erectile tissues in your penis healthy after prostate cancer treatment.
- See our Erectile Dysfunction information sheet to learn more.

