

What Women Can Do About Changes in Sexuality and Fertility



“I was worried about how radiation therapy could affect my sex life and ability to have children. It helped to talk about my options with my doctor before treatment.”

Questions from women getting radiation therapy:

What if I think I may be pregnant now?

Make sure to tell your doctor or nurse if you think you may be pregnant now. Radiation therapy can harm your unborn baby.

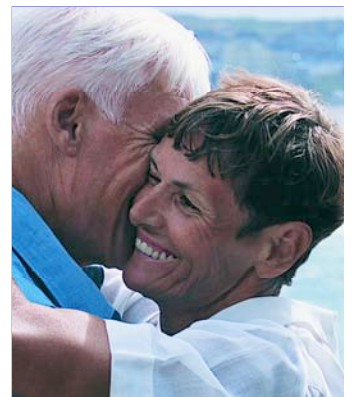
I just started treatment. Will I be able to have sex? Do I need to use birth control?

Talk with your doctor to find out if it is okay for you to have sex. Make sure to use a birth control method during treatment.

It is very important that you **don't** get pregnant during radiation therapy.

I just don't feel in the mood for sex these days. Is this normal?

Yes. The side effects of radiation therapy, such as being tired or in pain, can lower your sexual desire. Be easy on yourself. You are going through a lot. Talk with your partner about what you are feeling. There are many ways for you to stay close to each other during this time.



Questions from women getting radiation to the pelvis:

A woman in my support group said she's having signs of menopause. Will that happen to me?

Some women get hot flashes or stop having their periods during treatment. Tell your doctor if you notice these or other changes.

What are some other changes I might notice?

Radiation therapy to the pelvis can cause changes in the vagina. Many women notice pain when they have sex because the treatment can make the vagina more narrow. Or you may have a dry, itchy, or burning feeling. Talk with your doctor or nurse to get the best advice for you.

For some women:

- Gels or creams may help stop a dry, itchy, or burning feeling.
- Products such as Replens®, Astroglide®, or K-Y® Liquid can help make the vagina moist.
- A device called a dilator can also help. It stretches the vagina. Talk with your nurse to learn if this would be helpful for you.

Other resources:

American Cancer Society

Toll-free: 1-800-227-2345
(1-800-ACS-2345)
Online: www.cancer.org

fertileHOPE

Toll-free: 1-888-994-4673
(1-888-994-HOPE)
Online: www.fertilehope.org

Women who want to get pregnant after treatment ends should talk with their doctor. There are things you can do now to plan for the future.

Questions to ask your doctor or nurse:

1. How long will these problems last?
2. What products or treatments could help me with these problems?
3. What are all my options now if I would like to have children in the future?
4. Is there a support group for women that I could go to?

Free Services To Learn More

National Cancer Institute Cancer Information Service

Phone: 1-800-422-6237
(1-800-4-CANCER)
TTY: 1-800-332-8615
Online: www.cancer.gov
Chat Online: www.cancer.gov/help



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