



## A Gynecologic Cancer fact sheet

# sexuality & intimacy: *your guide*

Some treatments for gynecologic cancer can cause side effects that may change the way you feel about your body or make it difficult to enjoy intimate or sexual relationships. Which side effects you experience depend on your treatment course. You may experience some or none at all. Being aware of the possible side effects may help you anticipate them and learn ways to cope.

### Possible side effects include:

**Hair loss.** A common side effect of chemotherapy, hair loss is usually temporary. Still, it can be difficult to accept and **change the way you feel about your body.**

**Vaginal changes.** Some forms of treatment, such as hysterectomy and radiation therapy, may cause dryness, shortening, and narrowing of the vagina. These changes can make sexual activity uncomfortable. Using an over-the-counter vaginal lubricant or vaginal moisturizer may help you feel more comfortable. Your treatment team may also recommend a vaginal dilator.

**Reduced sexual desire.** The stress and fatigue you may experience during cancer treatment may cause you to lose interest in sex for a period of time.

### Tips for coping

Talk with your treatment team. They can provide advice based on your individual situation, so it is very important that you talk honestly with them.

A cancer diagnosis can impact you in many ways beyond the actual staging and treatment of the disease. As you schedule appointments with your gynecologic oncologist, you might have questions about various topics related to your health. The Your Guide series, available on the Foundation for Women's Cancer website, is meant to be a patient resource that you can discuss with your health care provider. This fact sheet covers issues about sexuality and intimacy that you might have questions about following treatment for gynecologic cancer.

You may want to ask:

- How will my treatment affect my sexuality?
- Will these effects be temporary?
- Are there other treatment options that might lessen these effects?
- Do you have suggestions about how I can deal with the effects of treatment on my sexuality?

**Communicate with your partner.** Cancer can strain both partners in a relationship. Talking about the sexual and emotional effects cancer has on your relationship can be difficult. But you may find it easier to work through the challenges if you talk about them. Be prepared to share your own feelings and to listen to what your partner has to say. A sexual health counselor or specialist may be helpful to navigate these conversations. A sexual health clinic may be available at your cancer institution.

**Shift your focus to intimacy.** Sexual intercourse is only one part of intimacy. You may find that touching, kissing, and cuddling are equally fulfilling.

**Be patient with yourself.** Understand that a return to a sexual relationship may take time. Your treatment team can tell you if and how long you should wait to have sex after treatment. It may be longer before you feel emotionally ready. Give yourself the time you need.

**Keep an open mind.** Having an open mind and a sense of humor about ways to improve your sexuality may help you and your partner find what works best for you.



Society of Gynecologic Oncology

The Foundation for Women's Cancer (FWC) is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization dedicated to supporting research, education and public awareness of gynecologic cancers.

[foundationforwomenscancer.org](http://foundationforwomenscancer.org)

The FWC is the official foundation of the Society of Gynecologic Oncology.