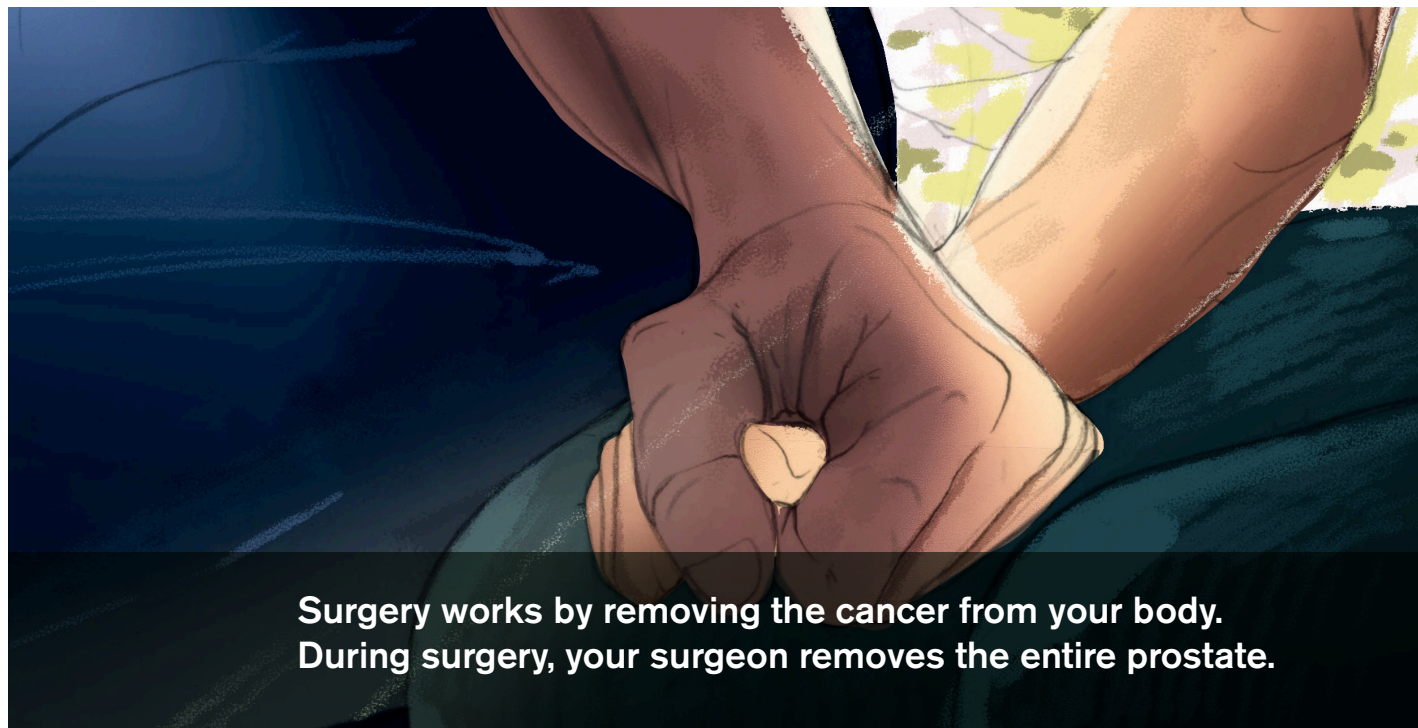


# About Your Prostate Cancer Treatment

## Surgery



**Surgery works by removing the cancer from your body.  
During surgery, your surgeon removes the entire prostate.**

### How will surgery for prostate cancer affect your sex life?

Every kind of prostate cancer treatment causes changes to your sexual function. After surgery for prostate cancer, you will likely notice these changes:

#### What can you do about the sexual side effects?

- Your doctor can prescribe medications or devices to help you have erections.
- A certified sex therapist can help you find a way to stay sexually active. In the US, you can find a certified sex therapist near you through the website for the American Association of Sexuality Educators, Counselors and Therapists – [aasect.org](http://aasect.org).

#### Problems with erections (Erectile dysfunction / ED)

- You will likely have some trouble getting your erections back right away after surgery.
- This may improve over the next couple of years. Erections usually do not go back to being as firm as they were before surgery.
- If you had problems before surgery and used medicine or a device to help your erections, you will most likely need to keep doing so.

#### Change in desire for sex

**Desire for sex varies, but most men continue to have their normal desire for sex after surgery.**

- Some men, when they find that desire does not lead to erection, try to avoid thinking about sex. This can make them think they are less interested in sex.
- Some men feel sad or upset about the changes in erections and worry about satisfying a partner. It's common that when men feel sad or upset in this way, they do not feel desire for sex.





## About Your Prostate Cancer Treatment: Surgery

### Changes in orgasm

#### Many men continue to have pleasurable orgasms after surgery

- Some men notice that orgasms take longer to achieve and are less intense. Rarely, some men have painful orgasms.
- This usually gets better with time and with sexual stimulation.

#### Your orgasms will be “dry” after surgery, meaning that you will not ejaculate when you reach orgasm

- Semen is mostly made in the prostate and seminal vesicles, which are removed during surgery.
- Some men feel sad because they miss the feeling of ejaculating. Others don't mind.

#### You might feel pain when you reach orgasm.

- Some men have this experience and it understandably can impact desire for sexual activity. This discomfort usually goes away with time. Talk to your doctor about why this may be happening and if there is a way to help the pain with medicine.

### Change in fertility

- After surgery, you will be infertile (not able to father a child).
- If you want to be able to have a child after treatment, talk to your doctor about banking your sperm (saving and freezing your sperm so you can use it after treatment).

### Problems with leaking urine during sex

You might leak urine during foreplay or orgasm. For many men, this stops after one year, but some men continue to have these symptoms. Some men feel embarrassed by it, but you can work through these emotions.

- Urine is a normal body fluid, just like ejaculate, sweat or saliva. It won't hurt you or your partner, even if it comes out during penetration, unless your partner has a history of recurrent infections. Using a condom will create a safe barrier.
- If you can, work on accepting this as a minor nuisance.
- You can disguise urine by using a lubricant to moisturize the penis during sexual activity.
- You can also use condoms to contain the leakage.

### Penile shortening

After surgery, you may notice that your penis is shorter. This can happen for several reasons:

- When your body is under stress, it sends out signals through your nervous system and makes your penis retract.
- Reconnecting the urethra to the bladder after removing the prostate can cause the penis to shorten.
- If you go a long time without having any erections, it can cause scarring of the tissues in your penis that help with erections (erectile tissues) and can lead to penile shortening.

The shortening may be limited with rehabilitation.



# About Your Prostate Cancer Treatment

## Radiation



Radiation destroys cancer cells by targeting them with strong and focused energy.

## How will radiation affect your sex life?

Every kind of prostate cancer treatment causes changes to sexual function. Here are some ways radiation may affect your sex life:

### Possible change in fertility

- Your treatment will affect your fertility. If you think that you might want to father a child in the future, please discuss this with your healthcare provider.

## What can you do about the sexual side effects?

- Your doctor can prescribe medications or devices to help you have erections.
- A certified sex therapist can help you find a way to stay sexually active. In the US, you can find a certified sex therapist near you through the website for the American Association of Sexuality Educators, Counselors and Therapists – [aasect.org](http://aasect.org).

### Problems with erections (Erectile dysfunction / ED)

- Even though radiation treatment is focused on the prostate, it can cause scarring in the tissues around the prostate, including the nerves that control erections.
- After treatment, erections gradually become less firm.
- This can happen soon after treatment, or years later.

### Possible change in sensitivity and orgasm

- Some men experience loss of sensitivity in the penis in addition to ED.
- For some men, orgasms are also less intense.
- When you reach orgasm, less semen will come out.

### Problems with leaking urine during sex

Some men leak urine during arousal, intercourse, or orgasm. Some men feel embarrassed by it, but you can work through these emotions.

- Urine is a normal body fluid, just like ejaculate, sweat or saliva. It won't hurt you or your partner, even if it comes out during penetration, unless your partner has a history of recurrent infections. Using a condom will create a safe barrier.
- If you can, work on accepting this as a minor nuisance.
- You can disguise urine by using lubricant to moisturize the penis during sexual activity.
- You can also use condoms to contain the leakage.



# About Your Prostate Cancer Treatment

## Hormone Therapy



Hormone therapy, also called Androgen Deprivation Therapy (ADT), works by blocking testosterone, a hormone that is thought to help cancer grow.

## How will hormone therapy affect your sex life?

Every kind of prostate cancer treatment causes changes to sexual function. Here are some ways hormone therapy may affect your sex life:

### What can you do about the sexual side effects?

- Your doctor can prescribe medications or devices to help you have erections.
- A certified sex therapist can help you find a way to stay sexually active. In the US, you can find a certified sex therapist near you through the website for the American Association of Sexuality Educators, Counselors and Therapists – [aasect.org](http://aasect.org).

### Lower sex drive

- Loss of testosterone usually lowers your sex drive.
- If your hormone treatment is temporary, your sex drive may return about 6 months after ending treatment.
- Some men may not get back to a normal testosterone level even after stopping hormone therapy, and their sex drive may stay lower.

### Genital shrinkage

- When your hormone levels decrease, you may notice that your testicles or penis get smaller.

### Problems with erections (Erectile dysfunction / ED)

- ED usually starts within six weeks of treatment.
- If you have to stay on hormone therapy long-term, ED may be permanent.
- If your therapy is short-term, you may see recovery of erections about six months after stopping treatment.

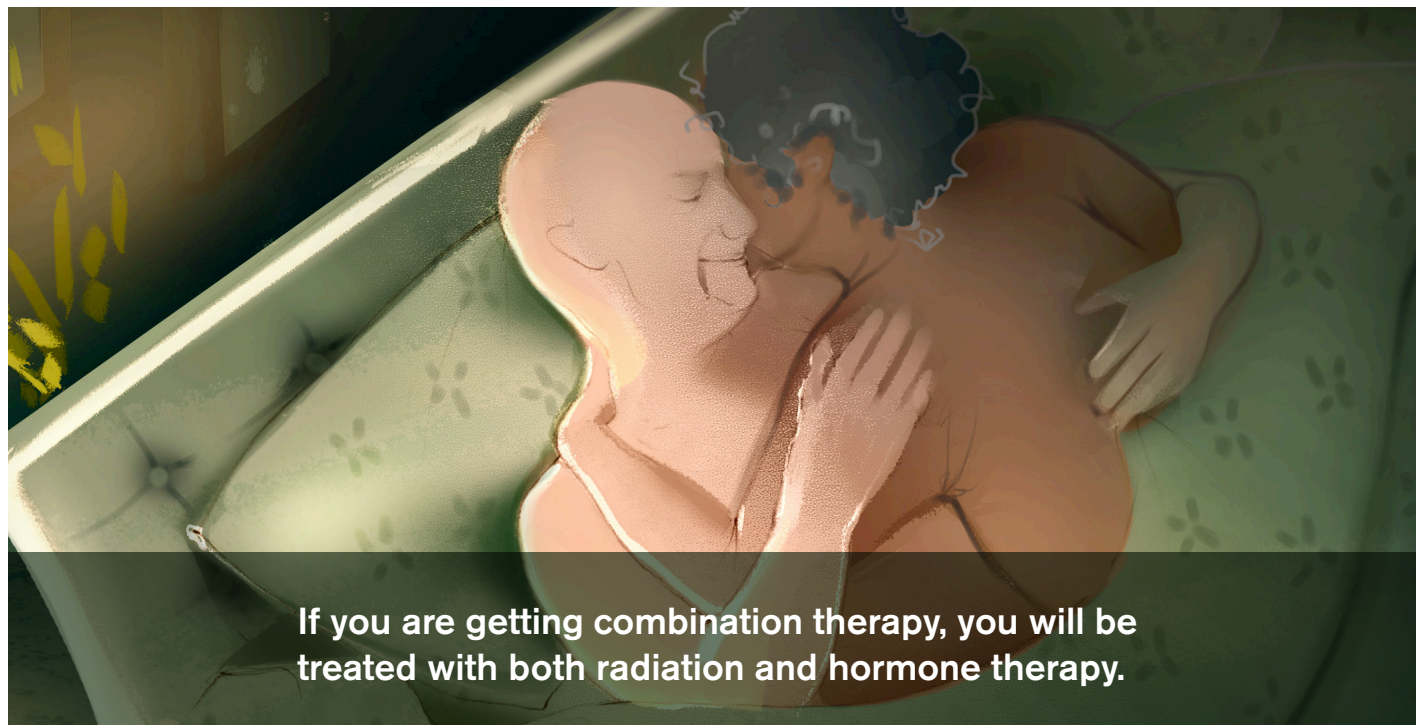
### Trouble having an orgasm

- Low testosterone can make it harder for some men to reach orgasm.
- When you reach orgasm, less semen will come out.



# About Your Prostate Cancer Treatment

## Combination Therapy



If you are getting combination therapy, you will be treated with both radiation and hormone therapy.

## How will combination therapy affect your sex life?

Every kind of prostate cancer treatment causes changes to sexual function. Here are some ways combination therapy may affect your sex life:

Radiation destroys cancer cells by targeting them with strong and focused energy. There are different kinds of radiation:

**External beam radiation** – a beam of radiation will be aimed at your prostate from the outside of your body.

**Internal seed radiation (brachytherapy)** – radiation seeds are put into your prostate to destroy the cancer. Radioactivity is temporary, but the seeds stay inside your prostate permanently.

Hormone therapy, also called Androgen Deprivation Therapy (ADT), works by blocking testosterone, a hormone that is thought to help cancer grow. By blocking testosterone, the cancer growth can be slowed.

### Problems with erections (Erectile dysfunction / ED)

- Both radiation and hormone treatment may cause problems with erections.
- Hormone therapy will impact erections sooner than radiation therapy.
- ED usually starts within six weeks of starting hormone treatment.
- If you have to stay on hormone therapy long-term, ED may be permanent.
- If your therapy is short-term, you may see recovery of erections about six months after stopping treatment.

### Lower sex drive

- Radiation treatment often causes temporary tiredness, which may lower your energy for sexual activity.
- Immediately after starting hormone therapy, many men feel a loss of energy and sense of fatigue. This can impact interest and energy for sexual activity.
- Sex drive is also lowered because of the loss of testosterone. After hormone treatments, testosterone does start to come back, though it may take several months, and sometimes longer.
- Some men may not get back to a normal testosterone level even after stopping hormone therapy, and their sex drive may stay lower.





## About Your Prostate Cancer Treatment: Combination Therapy

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### Changes in sensitivity and orgasm

- Lower testosterone makes it harder for some men to reach orgasm.
- Some men experience loss of sensitivity of the penis after radiation treatment which can also affect orgasm.
- For some men, orgasms are also less intense.
- When you reach orgasm, less semen will come out.

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### Problems with leaking urine during sex

Some men leak urine during arousal, intercourse, or orgasm. Some men feel embarrassed by it, but you can work through these emotions.

- Urine is a normal body fluid, just like ejaculate, sweat or saliva. It won't hurt you or your partner, even if it comes out during penetration, unless your partner has a history of recurrent infections. Using a condom will create a safe barrier.
- If you can, work on accepting this as a minor nuisance.
- You can disguise urine by using lubricant to moisturize the penis during sexual activity.
- You can also use condoms to contain the leakage.

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### Possible change in fertility

- Radiation treatment may affect your fertility. If you might want to father a child in the future, please discuss this with your healthcare provider.

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### Genital shrinkage

- When your hormone levels decrease, you may notice that your testicles or penis get smaller.

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### Emotional changes

- Low testosterone due to hormonal therapy can cause mood swings and irritability. Over time, this can stabilize.
- Many men also feel emotional because of all the sexual changes. Sometimes it is difficult to know whether being emotional is caused by the treatment, the cancer, or the changes that treatment has brought about.

## What can you do about the sexual side effects?

- Your doctor can prescribe medications or devices to help you have erections.
- Exercising regularly to strengthen your muscles and bones helps keep you strong and in touch with your body. It can also help with your mood.
- Talking can help. Talk to your partner, a family member, someone who has been through this treatment, or to a friend you trust.
- If you feel you are not coping well, a counselor can help sort out your feelings and find strategies for coping
- A certified sex therapist can help you and your partner, if you have one, find a way to stay sexually active. In the US, you can find a certified sex therapist near you through the website for the American Association of Sexuality Educators, Counselors and Therapists – [aasect.org](http://aasect.org).



# 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.

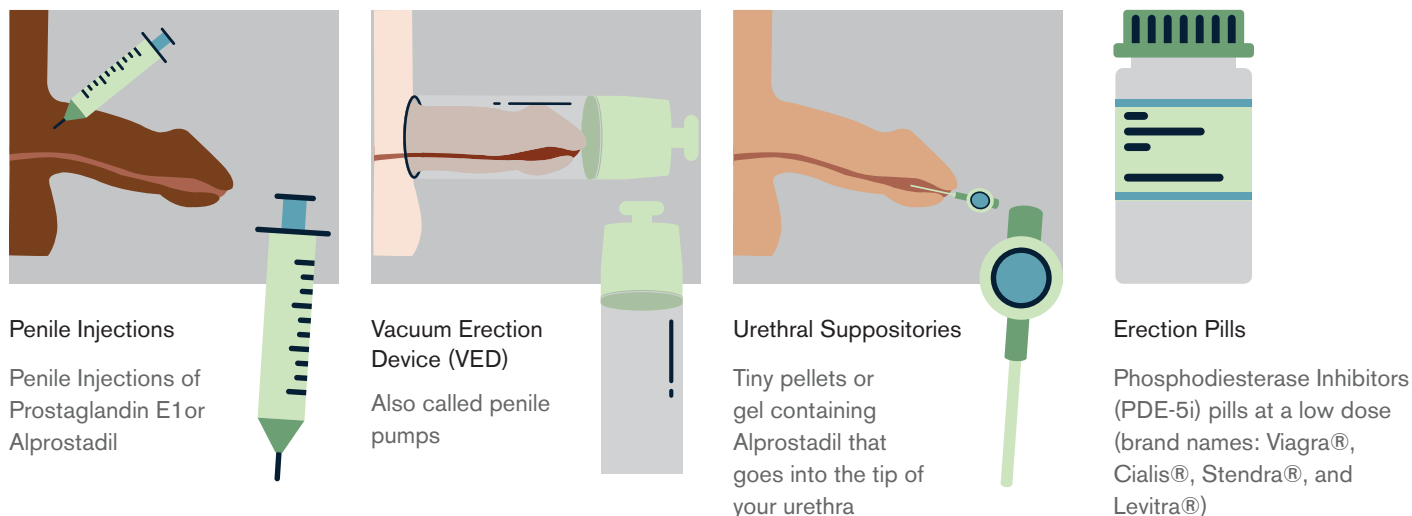
### Genital Shrinkage

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.



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.



# Sexual Recovery

## Coping with Sexual Side Effects: Gay and Bisexual 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:

### Changes that Impact Sex

#### Erection changes

Most prostate cancer treatments lead to problems with erections, at least temporarily. If you are the insertive partner (or top) during anal sex, it's possible you'll have trouble getting an erection firm enough for penetration.

- 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 Pleasure

- If you've been a receptive partner (or bottom) during anal sex, it's possible you'll feel less pleasure during penetration if you had surgery to remove your prostate.

### Changes the Tissues of the Anus

- If you had radiation and are the receptive partner (or bottom) during anal sex, it's possible you'll have some anal discomfort during sex. Talk to your doctor about when it's safe to have anal sex again.
- If you had surgery, it's important to wait until the tissue of your rectum and colon have healed before receiving anal sex.

### Changes that Impact Orgasm

#### Changes in Ejaculation

For some men, seeing and feeling ejaculate is part of what makes sex erotic and enjoyable.

- Men who have surgery to remove the prostate will have "dry orgasms" (no longer ejaculate).
- Men who have radiation will ejaculate a smaller amount.

Feelings of loss or sadness from these changes is normal.



## Changes in Orgasm

- After surgery or radiation, you may leak urine during sex. This will not hurt your partner.
- After hormone treatment, some men have trouble reaching orgasm, have less sensitivity of the penis and find orgasms to be less intense.

## Other Sexual Changes

### 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.

## 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.

# 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 role and repertoire to cope with sexual 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.
- Malecare ([www.Malecare.org](http://www.Malecare.org)) is a website for men with cancer that has information and support specifically for gay and bisexual men.

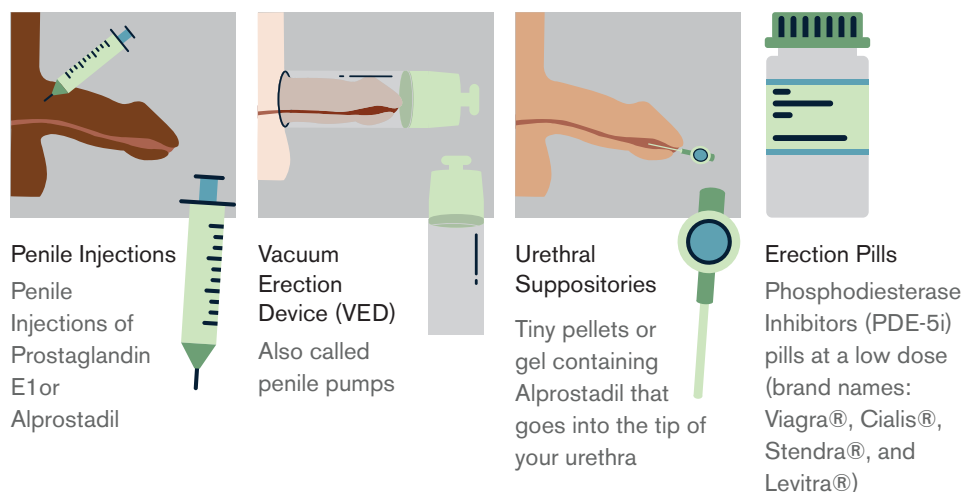
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- Talk to your doctor for more information, or check out our information sheets on:
  - Erection pills
  - Penile injections
  - Urethral suppositories
  - Vacuum erection devices (VED)

## Explore Penile Rehabilitation

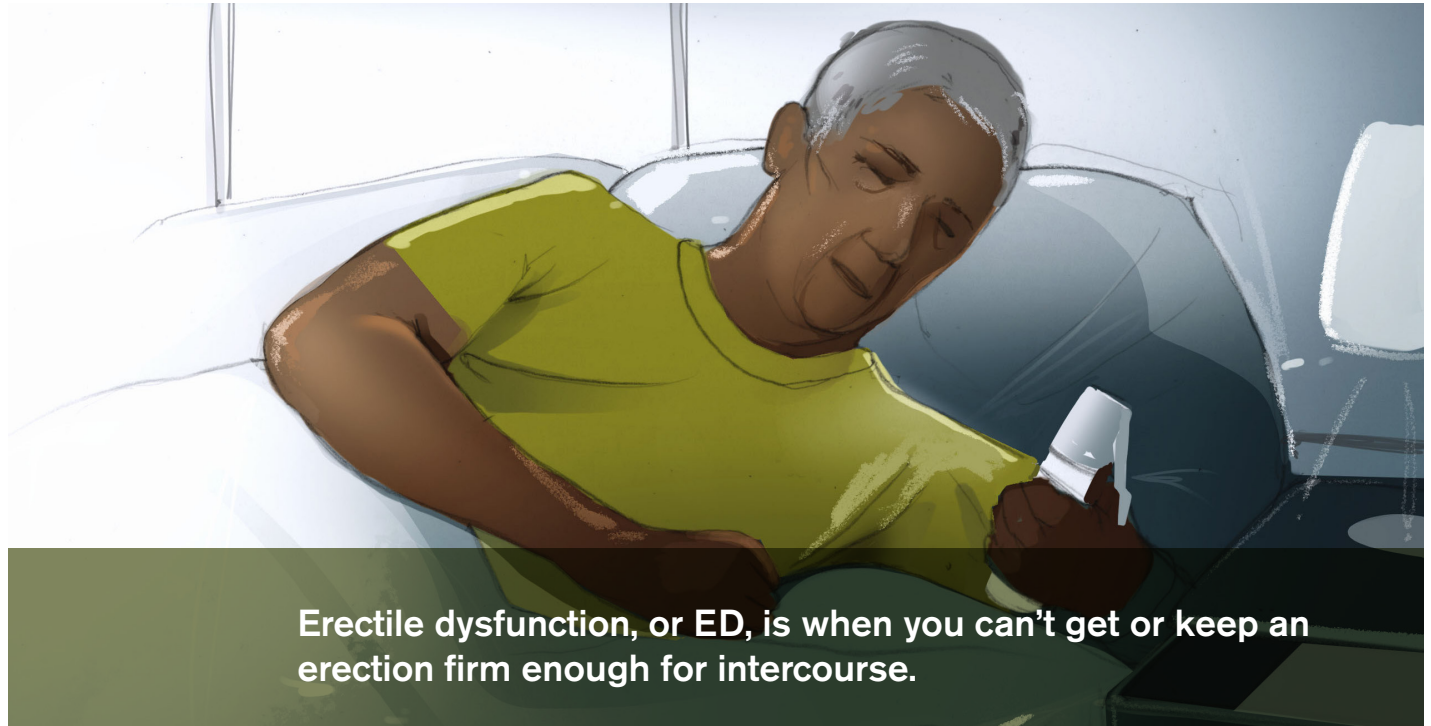
- Erection aids can also be used for penile rehabilitation. Penile rehab may help keep the erectile tissues in your penis healthy after prostate cancer treatment.
- See our Erectile Dysfunction information sheet to learn more.

Fig 1. Erection Aids



# Sexual Recovery

## Erectile Dysfunction & Penile Rehabilitation



Erectile dysfunction, or ED, is when you can't get or keep an erection firm enough for intercourse.

Almost all men who get treatment for prostate cancer will have some erectile dysfunction at some point.

ED from prostate cancer treatment can happen due to:

- Damage to nerves near the prostate that help erections happen
- Poor blood flow into the penis
- Inability to keep blood in the penis during an erection
- Anxiety or depression about performance

### When will ED start, and what will happen over time?

It depends on your treatment.

**Prostate cancer surgery:** ED starts right away.

**Hormone therapy:** ED usually starts within six weeks of starting treatment.

**Radiation treatment:** ED may start gradually after several months.

Depending on your treatment, erectile dysfunction may or may not get better over time. You can still have erections with the help of medication or devices. You'll be able to stay sexually active and have penetrative sex if you want to.

#### Erections lose firmness, depending on:

- How strong your erections were before treatment.
- Your age.
- If you have other medical problems that affect sexual function, like heart disease or diabetes.
- Your lifestyle (smoking and not exercising will make ED worse).
- Your medications (for example, beta-blockers can cause problems with erections ]if you had nerve-sparing surgery.
- Your willingness to work on penile rehabilitation.

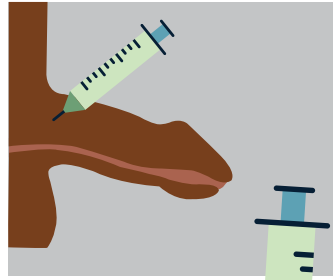


Fig 1. Penile Rehab Tools



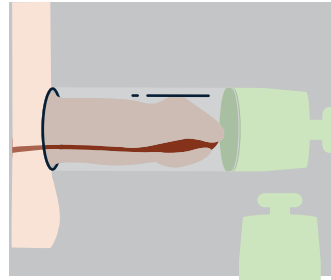
#### Erection Pills

Phosphodiesterase Inhibitors (PDE-5i) pills at a low dose (brand names: , Cialis®, Stendra®, and Levitra®)



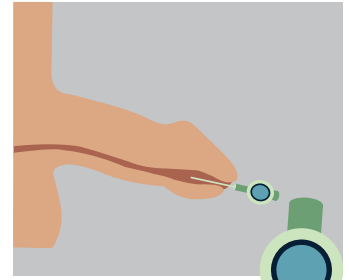
#### Penile Injections

Penile Injections of Prostaglandin E1 or Alprostadil



#### Vacuum Erection Device (VED)

Also called penile pumps



#### Urethral Suppositories

Tiny pellets or gel containing Alprostadil that goes into the tip of your urethra

## Penile rehabilitation

### Why is penile rehabilitation important?

Penile rehabilitation is an important way to keep your penis healthy after prostate cancer treatment. No one knows exactly how penile rehabilitation helps, but some scientists suggest that it:

- Promotes regular blood flow to the penis, which helps keep erectile tissues of the penis healthy.
- Preserves penis length.

### What is penile rehabilitation?

Doing penile rehabilitation means using medicines or devices to help keep erectile tissues of the penis healthy after prostate cancer treatment.

- You can think of it as physical therapy or exercise like you might do after knee replacement surgery.
- Penile rehabilitation is separate from having sex with another person and it's something you can do on your own.

However, if you have an interested partner, they can help you do the exercises.

### Penile rehabilitation is done using various methods and can include, alone and in combination: (Fig 1.)

- Erection Pills
- Penile Injections
- Vacuum Erection Device (VED)
- Urethral Suppositories

All these methods have potential side-effects. Some have to be taught under medical supervision. Ask your doctor what type of penile rehabilitation they would recommend for you, based on your overall health.

This may seem intimidating at first, but you can be taught how to use the tools. Many men find them helpful.

### When should I start?

Talk to your doctor first so you can be sure it's medically safe to start penile rehabilitation.



# Sexual Recovery

## What is sex like after combination therapy?



What **usually** happens to a man's body during sex?

What **changes** after prostate cancer treatment?

### Desire

- Desire develops and grows when we think about sex, have fantasies about sexual situations, enjoying those thoughts and begin to imagine making it happen.

#### After prostate cancer treatment

- Most men have a lower sex drive (desire).
- If hormone treatment is temporary, your sex drive may come back about 6 months after stopping treatment.
- Sex drive may stay lower for some men even after stopping hormone therapy.

### Arousal

- The body reacts to those thoughts and gets ready for sex.
- 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.
- Men get an erection.

#### After prostate cancer treatment

- You may feel less sensitivity in your penis and you will need longer stimulation.
- You may not be able to get an erection on your own.
- You can still have erections with the help of aids like vacuum pumps, penile suppositories, injections or pills.

### Plateau

- The body gets ready to have an orgasm.
- Excitement builds with stimulation and the feeling of pleasure.
- The body begins to tense up.
- Men's testicles withdraw up into the scrotum and the erection becomes very hard.

#### After prostate cancer treatment

- It may take longer to reach orgasm.

### Orgasm

- The body suddenly releases sexual tension.
- Muscles in the pelvic floor contract or spasm.
- Men release semen.

#### After prostate cancer treatment

- You may have trouble reaching orgasm.
- When you reach orgasm, less semen will come out.

### Resolution / Refractory Period

- The body relaxes.
- Muscles relax, blood pressure drops, there is a feeling of satisfaction and wellbeing.
- Men usually need recovery time before they can reach orgasm again.
- If the orgasm is experienced with a partner, couples often feel relaxed and connected.

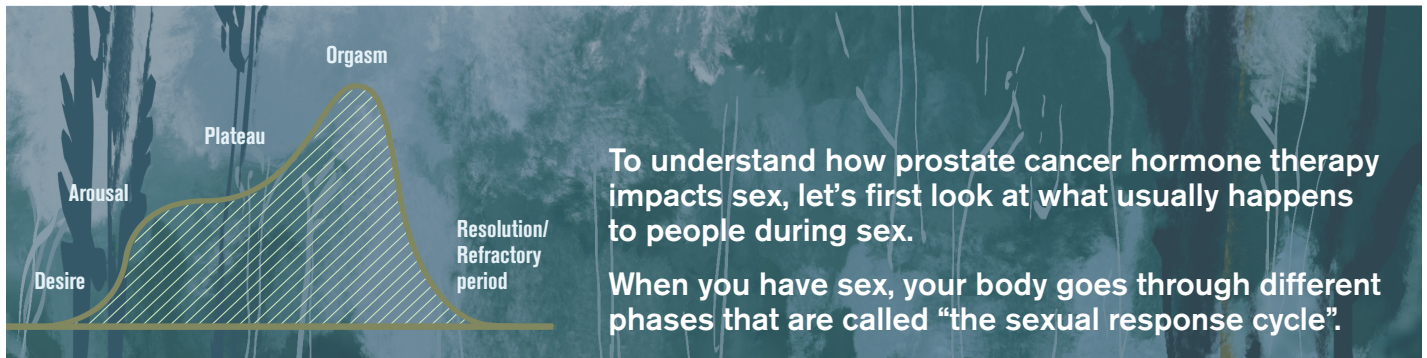
#### After prostate cancer treatment

- You will need to wait longer before you can reach orgasm again. You will still feel relaxation and pleasure after orgasm.



# Sexual Recovery

## What is sex like after hormone therapy?



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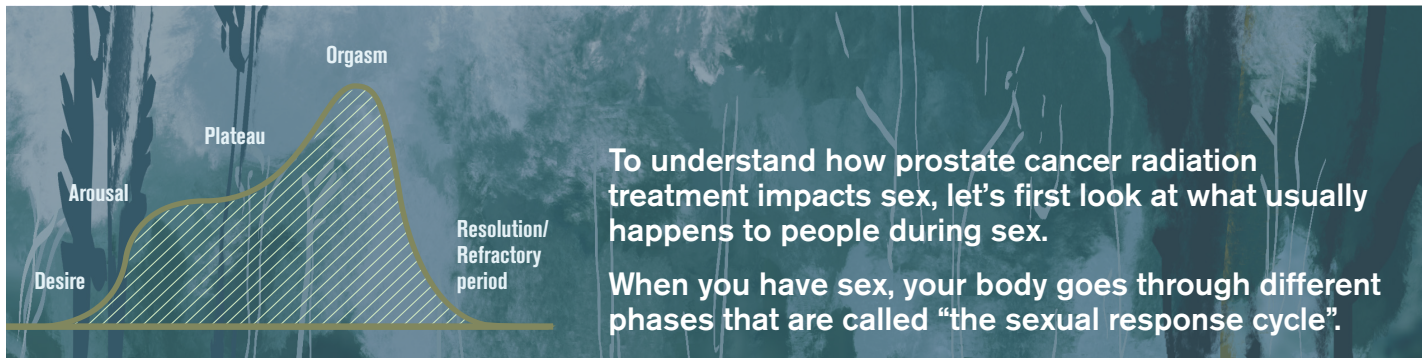
#### After prostate cancer treatment

- You will need to wait longer before you can reach orgasm again. You will still feel relaxation and pleasure after orgasm.



# Sexual Recovery

## What is sex like after radiation?



What **usually** happens to a man's body during sex?

What **changes** after prostate cancer treatment?

### Desire

- Desire develops and grows when we think about sex, have fantasies about sexual situations, enjoying those thoughts and begin to imagine making it happen.

#### After prostate cancer treatment

- Most men continue to have their usual desire for sex.

### Arousal

- The body reacts to those thoughts and gets ready for sex.
- 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.
- Men get an erection.

#### After prostate cancer treatment

- You may feel less sensitivity in your penis and you will need longer stimulation.
- Over time, erections can become less firm. This can happen soon after treatment, or years later.
- You can still have erections with the help of aids like vacuum pumps, penile suppositories, injections or pills.

### Plateau

- The body gets ready to have an orgasm.
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- The body suddenly releases sexual tension.
- Muscles in the pelvic floor contract or spasm.
- Men release semen.

#### After prostate cancer treatment

- Your orgasm may be different. You will likely still be able to reach orgasm, but it may take longer. Your orgasm may feel less intense.
- When you reach orgasm, less semen will come out.

### Resolution / Refractory Period

- The body relaxes.
- Muscles relax, blood pressure drops, there is a feeling of satisfaction and wellbeing.
- Men usually need recovery time before they can reach orgasm again.
- If the orgasm is experienced with a partner, couples often feel relaxed and connected.

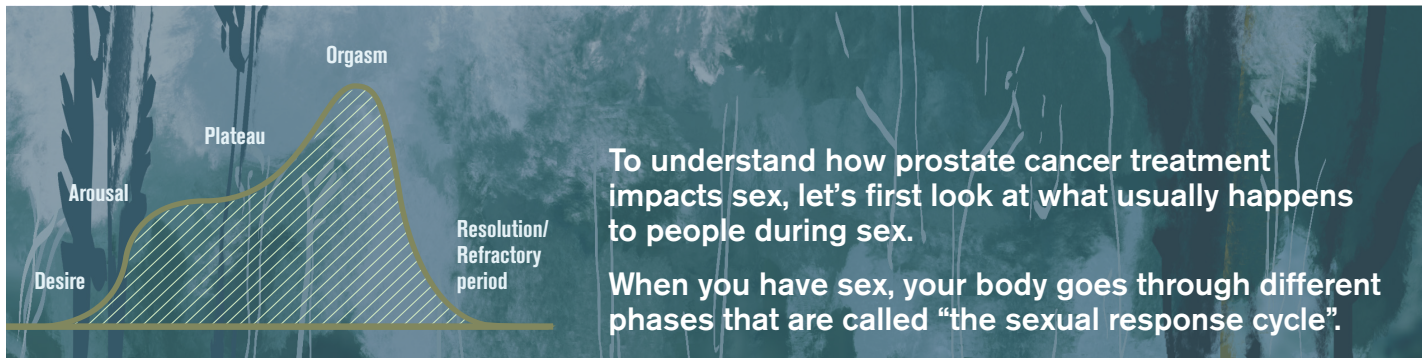
#### After prostate cancer treatment

- You will need to wait longer before you can reach orgasm again. You will still feel relaxation and pleasure after orgasm.



# Sexual Recovery

## What is sex like after prostate cancer surgery?



What **usually** happens to a man's body during sex?

What **changes** after prostate cancer treatment?

### Desire

- Desire develops and grows when we think about sex, have fantasies about sexual situations, enjoying those thoughts and begin to imagine making it happen.

#### After prostate cancer treatment

- Most men continue to have their usual desire for sex.
- But, the body does not respond to the fantasy or visual stimulation by creating an erection because the nerves that create erections are not working.
- You may have fewer sexual fantasies.
  - This is often due to feeling sad and discouraged about not being able to have erections when you feel turned on.

### Arousal

- The body reacts to those thoughts and gets ready for sex.
- 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.
- Men get an erection.

#### After prostate cancer treatment

- You may feel less sensitivity in your penis and you will need longer stimulation.
- You may not be able to get an erection on your own.
- You can still have erections with the help of aids like vacuum pumps, penile suppositories, injections or pills.

### Plateau

- The body gets ready to have an orgasm.
- Excitement builds with stimulation and the feeling of pleasure.
- The body begins to tense up.
- Men's testicles withdraw up into the scrotum and the erection becomes very hard.

#### After prostate cancer treatment

- It may take longer to reach orgasm.

### Orgasm

- The body suddenly releases sexual tension.
- Muscles in the pelvic floor contract or spasm.
- Men release semen.

#### After prostate cancer treatment

The good news is that you don't need an erection to have an orgasm. The nerves that control pleasure are not affected by prostate cancer treatment.

- Your orgasm may be different. You will likely still be able to reach orgasm, but it may take longer.
- Your orgasm will be “dry”, meaning you will not ejaculate.
- You may feel pain when you reach orgasm but this usually goes away with time.

### Resolution / Refractory Period

- The body relaxes.
- Muscles relax, blood pressure drops, there is a feeling of satisfaction and wellbeing.
- Men usually need recovery time before they can reach orgasm again.
- If the orgasm is experienced with a partner, couples often feel relaxed and connected.

#### After prostate cancer treatment

- You will need to wait longer before you can reach orgasm again. You will still feel relaxation and pleasure after orgasm.



# Sexual Recovery

## The Emotional Work



It's normal to have a lot of different feelings about sex and intimacy after prostate cancer treatment.

## Grief is part of recovery

Getting your sex life back on track will require both physical and emotional work.

You and your partner may feel a sense of grief because the familiar ways of interacting and experiencing sex have changed.

Feeling grief, especially when your sex life changes, is completely normal. Both men and partners can feel upset. It's all part of the recovery process.

### You may find that you have:    You may feel:

- Mood swings
- Crying spells
- A shorter fuse
- Shocked
- Sad
- Angry
- Frustrated
- Hopeless
- Scared of what the future will bring
- Hopeful that things will work out, even if they're not the same

These are all emotions that people feel when they're grieving. We usually think about grief when someone dies, but losing something that is familiar, like usual sexual interactions, can make one feel those feelings, too.

## Partners feel grief too

### Partners can also feel grief, but those feelings may differ from the man's feelings:

- Partners may worry about how the sexual changes will affect them and their pleasure during sex.
- Partners might be unsure about how they should help with the sexual recovery.

### Even with preparation, couples can suddenly feel less confident:

- Some men feel less manly when they can't have erections.
- Some people worry that their partner is not attracted to them if he can't have erections.

- If there were relationship or sexual problems before, coping with sexual changes after prostate cancer treatment can be challenging.
- Both members of a couple might grieve with different timing. Even if you're not always "on the same page", you can still support one another through the process.





## Sexual Recovery: The Emotional Work

### Feeling grief during sex

While you're working on staying sexually connected, you may be distracted by thoughts about how sex used to be, by sadness about the changes, and by worries about whether you or your partner will be able to enjoy making love again. Those thoughts and feelings are part of grief and will get better as you learn to make love with more confidence.

## How do you work through grief?

### Communication is vital.

Many people don't talk during sex or about their sexual relationship. Yet now, more than ever, it's important to talk about sex and about how you'll manage the changes. Couples sometimes avoid talking about their feelings because they're overwhelmed or trying not to burden one another. Research shows that when people don't let each other know what they're going through, it hurts their relationships.

### Not talking can lead to:

- Avoiding sex.
- Starting to feel distant from each other.
- Losing emotional closeness.
- Decrease in confidence.
- Depression.

### What can talking do:

Talking about sexual changes can ease the grieving process and bring you closer.

If you're already good at communicating about sex, keep talking openly with each other. If you have not been in the habit of talking about sex and are not sure about how to start, you may find it helpful to work with a sex therapist to help you get more comfortable.

### Stay active.

Whether it's hobbies, fixing things around the house, or getting together with friends – get back to doing the things you love.

### Patience is key.

Recovering from prostate cancer treatment and adjusting to the changes takes time. Understanding what to expect and accepting the process will help you feel more in charge.

With time, the feelings of grief will become less intense. Here are some reasons:

- You'll know how your body works and reacts.
- You'll know what to do to get the most pleasure.
- You and your partner will have a better sense of how you work together.
- You'll feel more competent as a lover and partner.

Remind each other to be patient because the process of recovery takes time and frustration makes it harder.

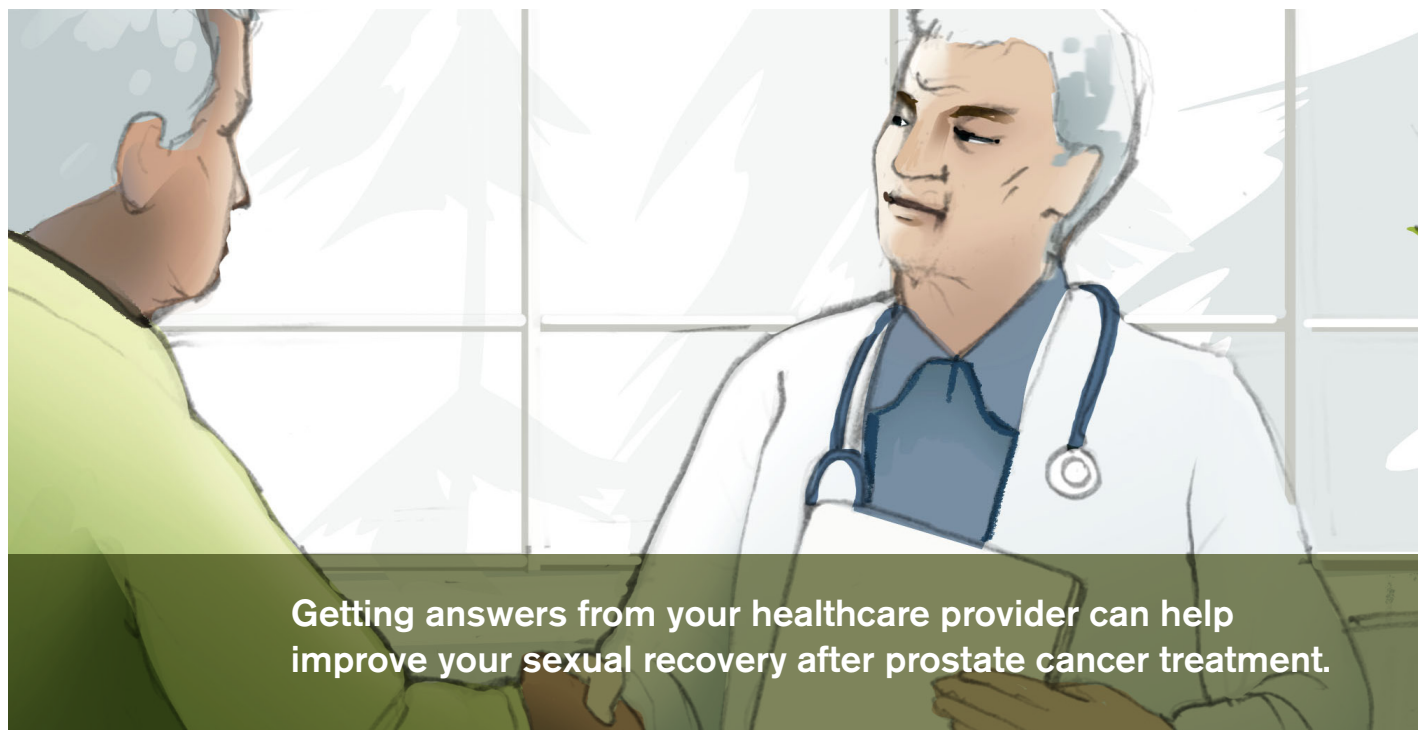
### Get support.

If you're having a hard time managing your feelings, talk to your healthcare provider. They can help you find a therapist or counselor who will understand your needs. You can also find a qualified sex therapist in your area. Remember, many men and their partners are on this same journey with you. Don't be afraid to reach out to your doctor, counselor, nurse or social worker.



# Sexual Recovery

## Talking With Your Healthcare Provider



Getting answers from your healthcare provider can help improve your sexual recovery after prostate cancer treatment.

**If your healthcare provider is uncomfortable discussing your sexual concerns, you might need to be proactive and find other people on your healthcare provider's team who could help you or provide other resources.**

All treatments for prostate cancer have sexual side effects. If sexual health is important to you, you will need to have access to resources and information to help you. Your healthcare providers can provide answers or point you towards others with the expertise to help you. Don't hesitate to ask your cancer healthcare providers questions. You have a right to have that information.

Research has shown that people who maintain open communication with their healthcare providers tend to be more satisfied with the care they receive. Finding ways to talk about sexuality and prostate cancer can help improve your sexual recovery and quality of life.

### **Your wish to have your questions answered is legitimate**

If you feel nervous about bringing up sexual health, remind yourself:

- You're not alone
- Your issues are real
- Your concerns are valid

### **Who can help?**

You can begin by talking to your doctor or to your nurse during a follow up appointment. They may refer you to other specialists for specific concerns. Some of these specialists are physical therapists, sex therapists, mental health professionals, and social workers.





## Sexual Recovery: Talking with Your Provider

### Before your appointment

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#### Ask yourself:

- What was your sexual function like before treatment?
  - How important is sex to you and your partner?
  - What are your current goals for sexual intimacy and sexual activity after treatment?
- 

#### Prepare your questions

- Before speaking to your healthcare provider, set time aside with your partner to think about what you want to ask.
  - Make a list of questions and then a short-list of your top questions, in case you don't have time to get to all of them.
  - If you feel shy, rehearse asking the questions. You can role play the questions with your partner or a trusted friend.
  - Make an agreement with your partner that you'll help each other get the questions asked.
- 

#### Prepare your provider

You can introduce the subject during an office visit, or to leave as a message when scheduling an appointment:

- "I would like to discuss questions about my sexual health after treatment during this (the next) appointment."

### Start the discussion

Let your healthcare provider know that you appreciate being able to talk about this topic because it's important to you. It will be an ice-breaker for both you and your provider.

- Begin to go through your questions.
  - Ask your healthcare provider to be available for follow up questions after the appointment.
  - Take notes on the answers.
- 

### Sample questions to ask your provider

#### Erection problems:

- Given my age and how my erections are now, what can I expect after my treatment?
- Can I do anything to help my erections get better?
- If I have erection problems after treatment, will they be permanent?

#### Treatments for erection problems:

- If I have problems with erections, can you help me decide what treatments for erections might work for me?
- Can you tell me about the side-effects?
- Will there be anyone, after treatment, who can help me work on erection problems?

#### Penile shrinkage:

- Can I expect my penis to shrink?
- What causes it?
- Is there a way to reverse it?

#### Ability to have desire for sex (libido):

- Will my libido/desire change after treatment?
- Is that change permanent?
- If I don't have libido, can I still have orgasms?

#### Ability to have an orgasm:

- Will I be able to have an orgasm after my treatment?
- Will it be the same or different?
- Will it take longer to get to orgasm?
- Will I still ejaculate?

#### Urine leakage during sexual activity:

- Is it normal to have leakage during sex after prostate cancer treatment?
- Does this get better?
- Can the urine hurt my partner?

#### Questions for gay/bisexual men:

Will it feel different to receive anal sex (bottom) after my prostate cancer treatment?

Will I be able to get a strong enough erection to penetrate a partner (top) during anal sex?

Do I need to avoid receiving anal sex after surgery or radiation treatment? If so, for how long?

#### General Questions:

- What should my expectations be for recovery of my erectile function?
- What strategies and resources for sexual recovery are available for my partner and me?



# Sexual Recovery

## Pills for Treating Erectile Dysfunction



**After prostate cancer treatment, erection pills can be used for penile rehabilitation or sexual activity.**

Some doctors recommend erection pills in low doses after surgery for prostate cancer to create blood flow into the penis to keep the penis healthy, not to produce a full erection. Later in recovery, these pills can also work for many men to make erections strong enough for penetration.



Viagra®, Cialis®, Levitra® and Stendra® are some familiar brand names for erection pills. A new, generic medicine that is much cheaper is called Revatio® or Sildenafil. These pills are also known as “PDE-5 inhibitors” and work by blocking an enzyme called Phosphodiesterase (PDE-5).

### How erection pills work

Your penis needs a healthy blood flow to achieve an erection. These pills relax the smooth muscles outside of the penis, making it easier for blood to flow and cause an erection.

Your doctor can prescribe erection pills and will work with you to find which pill is best for you.

### Side effects

Although erection pills are helpful, they do come with some risks and side effects. Side effects may include:

- Headache
- Flushing (redness or warmth in your face, neck, or chest)
- Upset stomach
- Cold symptoms (stuffy nose)
- Back pain (Cialis®)

Contact your doctor immediately if any of these symptoms last longer than 4 hours, you have allergic reactions, or experience more severe symptoms.

### Potential Risks

Blood pressure tends to drop slightly in men after they take erection pills. Avoid taking these pills with medicines that have nitrates because they also lower blood pressure. If you take erection pills and nitrates, your blood pressure can drop to life threatening levels. If you're unsure about what nitrates are, ask your doctor or pharmacist for more information.

Other types of medicines, such as alpha blockers (Cardura®, Hytrin®) used to treat high blood pressure, may cause bad interactions. Use caution if you have a history of prolonged erection (an erection that lasts for hours and is painful), heart attack, arrhythmias, stroke, or eye disease.

To avoid drug interactions or other possible risks, talk to your doctor about any health conditions or other medicines you're taking.

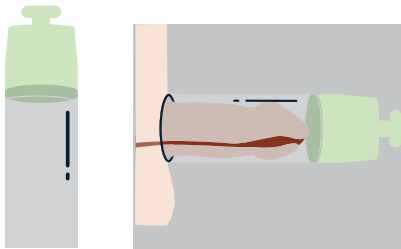


# Sexual Recovery

## Vacuum Erection Devices (VEDs)



Vacuum Erection Devices, or VEDs, promote erections and help prevent penile shrinkage.



Vacuum Erection Devices (VEDs), also known as a penis pumps, promote blood flow into the penis. When used correctly, they create erections hard enough for penetration. They may also help with stretching the penis and reducing penile shrinkage.

Before using a VED, we recommend talking to your healthcare provider about all of your health conditions, any other erectile aids you've tried, and any medications you take, including herbal supplements. This will help prevent potential problems.

### How they work

The VED comes with a plastic tube that fits over the penis, a hand or battery-powered pump attached to the tube, and a band (constriction ring).

Below are some basic instructions on how to use a VED. Since there are several models out on the market, it always best to refer to the instructions provided with your pump.

1. First, put the plastic tube over your penis and use lubricant to create a vacuum seal. You may need to trim your pubic hair to get a good seal.
2. Next, activate the pump to pull blood from the body into the vessels of the penis. Filling the blood vessels will lead to a hard erection.
3. Once you get an erection, put the band around the base of the penis. This will trap blood in the penis and help you keep an erection.

The band should be worn for no longer than 30 minutes. Stop using the pump if the suction causes pain.

The erection you get with a VED will look and feel different. While wearing the band, you may notice:

- Discoloration (bluish appearance) of the penis .
- Your penis may feel cold .
- Your penis may feel like it's hanging (hinge effect).

It's important not to pump beyond a point of discomfort because it may result in bruising. If you are over-pumping, you'll notice:

- Pinpoint-sized red dots on the shaft or head of the penis.

### Potential Risks

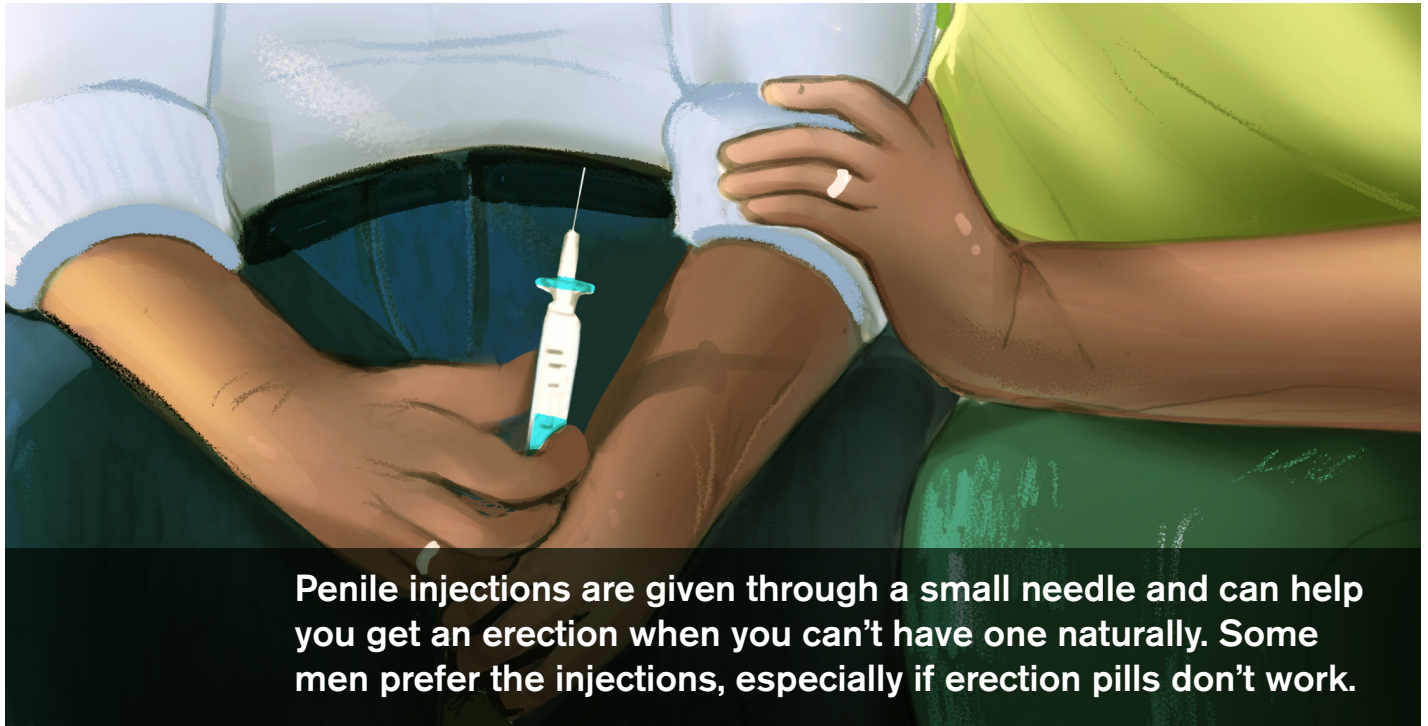
VEDs are very safe for most men, but there are some potential low-level risks to be aware of:

- Increased risk of bleeding if taking blood-thinning medications for heart disease or blood clots.
- If you have sickle cell anemia or another blood disorder, there is a risk for blood clots or bleeding.

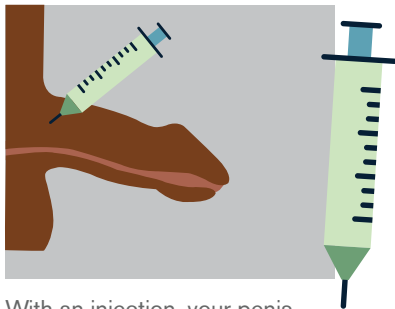


# Sexual Recovery

## Penile Injections



Penile injections are given through a small needle and can help you get an erection when you can't have one naturally. Some men prefer the injections, especially if erection pills don't work.



With an injection, your penis can typically become erect after 15 to 20 minutes.

### Does it hurt?

Here's what men had to say about the injections:

*"I was surprised how easy and painlessly the needle went in. I did get some aching pain after but it's really not bad."*

*"It felt like a mosquito bite. Just a twinge – not painful like I expected. And definitely worth it!"*

### How they work

A very small and thin needle (like a diabetic needle) injects medicine along the side of the penis. The medicine relaxes the outer wall muscles of the penis, making it easier for blood to flow and an erection to happen. The erection usually lasts between 20 minutes to an hour, although you may reach orgasm sooner.

### Side effects

Most medicines have some side effects and risks. Temporary side effects from penile injections may include:

- Bruising or bleeding at the injection site
- Penile pain (during injection or erection)
- Prolonged erection (an unwanted erection that lasts for hours and is painful)

Contact your doctor immediately if you have an erection that lasts longer than 4 hours.

Possible, but rare, side effects include:

- Scarring at the injection site
- Curving of the penis

### Potential Risks

Penile injections could be risky if you have a history of:

- Sickle cell anemia or trait
- Leukemia, lymphoma, or myeloma

### Ask your doctor for a prescription

If you want to try penile injections, talk to your doctor.

Your doctor can:

- Prescribe the medicine
- Help decide on a dose that works well for you
- Teach you how to give yourself the injection
- Answer questions about other erection methods

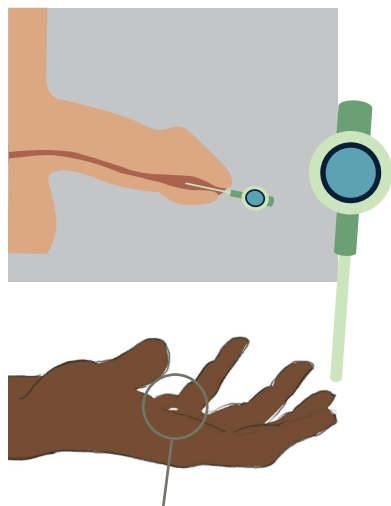
Depending on what your doctor prescribes, the injections may be brand name, generic, or compounded:

- Edex® (brand name)
- Prostaglandin E-1 (generic)
- BiMix or TriMix or Quadmix (compounded, and available at a special pharmacy)



# Sexual Recovery

## Urethral Suppositories



Suppository size reference

Suppositories are very small and are easily tolerated by most men. They come with an easy-to-use applicator. You will need a prescription to use the suppositories.

### How they work

The suppositories are about the size of a grain of rice. You insert them into the opening of the penis (urethra) using a special applicator. The medicine in urethral suppositories widens the diameter of the arteries in the penis, and increases blood flow into the penis.

The medicine in the urethral suppositories can also come as a gel that you insert into the urethra. Your doctor or nurse can teach you how to insert the suppository in the office, and decide on a dose that works well for you.

### Side effects

Most men do well with suppositories, but some temporary reactions can include:

- Pain in the penis
- Pain or burning sensation in the urethra
- Pain in the testicles

### Potential Risks

A history of any of the following conditions could make urethral suppositories risky for you to use:

- History of sickle cell anemia
- History of leukemia, lymphoma, or myeloma
- History of difficulty pushing urine through the urethra (urethral stricture)

Talk to your doctor about all of your health conditions and any medications you take. This will help prevent potential problems.



# Sexual Recovery

## Sexual Function Aids for Women



Partners play a very important role for men with cancer, often becoming the caregiver. When partners become caregivers and relationship roles change, the needs of the partner can be overlooked. It's important to address sexual health needs of both men with cancer and their partners. The partner's sexual health is important on its own. It also impacts the sexual recovery of the survivor and the health of the relationship.

## Menopause and Sexual Health

Female partners may be post-menopausal or going through the transition to menopause.

- Menopause causes a loss of estrogen in the body which has a direct impact on vaginal health.
- Loss of estrogen leads to loss of vaginal lubrication and the vaginal tissue can become thinner and less elastic.
- As a result, sexual activity may become painful.

If a woman is having menopause-related changes in vaginal health, like discomfort with or without sexual activity, it's important to address this problem because these side effects of menopause tend to last over time.

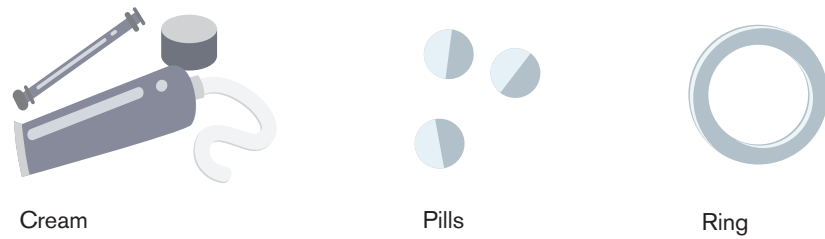
Maintaining vaginal health includes restoring moisture and stretch to the vaginal tissue. Pleasurable sexual stimulation either with a partner or through masturbation is also healthy for the genital tissue.

## Strategies for Female Sexual Health

Sexual aids are an important part of women's sexual health. These include vaginal moisturizers, vaginal lubricants, vibrators and vaginal dilators. Here are some strategies to help with female sexual health:



Fig 1. Vaginal Estrogens



## Vaginal Moisturizers

Vaginal Moisturizers provide long-term relief from dryness and irritation and may help restore health to vaginal and vulvar tissue. Just like moisturizing your face or hands, after menopause, moisturizing the vagina may help keep tissues healthy and strong.

Women typically apply moisturizer 3 to 5 times per week, including both internal and external tissues (vulva). For best absorption, apply at bedtime before lying down.

There are a variety of over-the-counter vaginal moisturizers that are usually applied internally with a thin applicator.

### Water-based lubricants

Water-based lubricants provide a natural feel and won't leave a residue. They are widely available and come in a range of textures. However, water-based lubricants can start to feel sticky. To reduce stickiness and make the area slick again, add a spray of water. Water-based lubricants:

- Are easy to clean off.
- Do not stain.
- Are safe with condoms.
- Are safe to use with intimacy aids and intimacy toys that are made out of silicone.
- Have the lowest chance of an allergic reaction.

## Vaginal Estrogen Therapy (Hormonal moisturizer)

Vaginal estrogen is a kind of hormone replacement therapy where you put cream or a small tablet in the vagina. It releases a small amount of estrogen within the vagina.\*

### Vaginal estrogen:

- Increases the thickness and elasticity of vaginal tissues.
- Increases natural vaginal lubrication.

These benefits work to relieve vaginal dryness and lessen discomfort with intercourse.

Some women consider vaginal estrogen if non-hormonal options don't help enough. Estrogen treatments are by prescription only.

### Vaginal estrogen comes in several forms, including: (Fig. 1)

- Cream
- Pills
- Ring

*\*You will need to talk to a doctor or gynecologist first before using vaginal estrogens. This is especially true if you have a family history of breast, ovarian, uterine, endometrial, cervical cancer.*

## Lubricants

Lubricants help make sexual activity more comfortable and enjoyable by making the surface tissue slick and reducing friction. Avoid lubricants that are flavored, scented, or that advertise a warming sensation, as they may be irritating. Lubricants can be used directly before sexual activity.

There are several types of lubricants, including water-based, silicone-based, and petroleum/oil-based.

### Silicone-based lubricants

Silicone-based lubricants do not get sticky and because they are not absorbed by the skin. Silicone-based lubricants:

- Last longer than water based lubricants.
- Should be washed off.
- Should not be used with silicone/ rubber toys or silicone dilators because they can break down the rubber over time.

### Hybrid lubes

Hybrid lubes are a mixture of water and silicone based products. They have a natural feel and last longer because of the silicone. Like other silicone-based lubes, hybrid lubes should not be used with silicone sex toys or dilators.

### Lubricants to Avoid

**Avoid commercial oil-based lubricants like petroleum jelly and baby oil.** These oil-based products can break down and damage latex and rubber products and can cause tears in condoms. They can also change pH balance of the vagina which may raise the risk of bacterial infection.

**Avoid lubricants with glycerin.** Any lubricants that contain glycerin can act like a sugar and promote bacterial infection as well as yeast infection. For that reason, it's best to avoid them.





## Sexual Function Aids for Women

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### Vibrators

People tend to think of vibrators primarily as sex toys. In fact, **vibrators can also be used as sexual aids**, whether you're the person who was treated for prostate cancer or a partner.

Here are some benefits of vibrators:

- Sexual stimulation, including use of a vibrator, promotes blood flow to the genital tissue.
- Blood flow to the genitals helps to maintain genital health.
- Increased blood flow also improves sexual pleasure.
- Vibrators can provide extra stimulation to help individuals feel greater pleasure and reach orgasm.

**Vibrators come in many sizes, shapes, and different functions.**

- Some vibrators are small and meant for external use only, not penetration.
- Others vary in size and shape and can be used for penetrative sexual activity.
- Some vibrators are shaped to stimulate both the sensitive front wall of the vagina as well as the clitoris.

Individuals can use vibrators for self-touch and/or sexual rehab. Couples can also use them together for sexual pleasure.

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### Vaginal Dilators

It is not uncommon for women to have pelvic pain, including pain with sexual activity. Although there are many reasons why women may suffer from pelvic pain, sometimes discomfort is caused by pelvic floor muscles which are tight and overly-engaged. A gynecologist can evaluate you to assess the cause of discomfort.

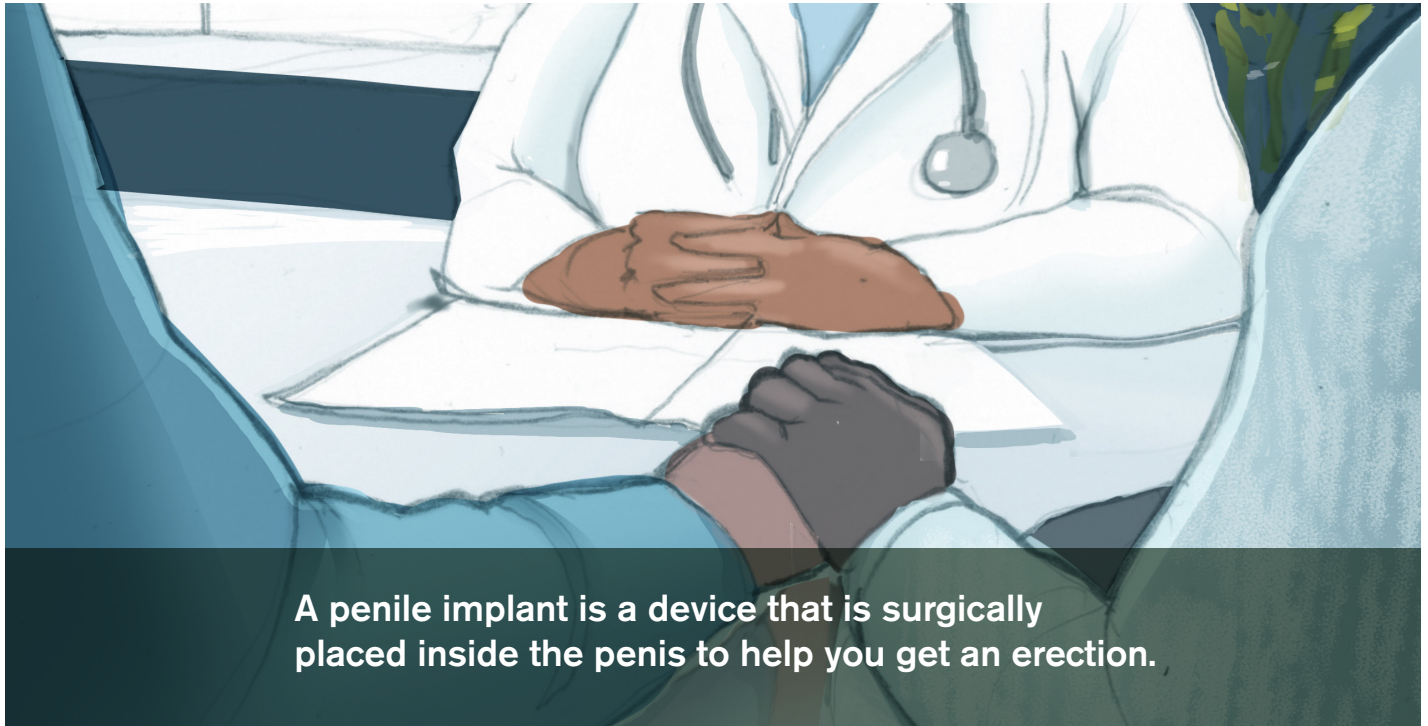
Vaginal dilator therapy is one strategy used to help women learn to relax the pelvic floor and increase vaginal capacity. It works by gently stretching the vaginal tissue. The goal of vaginal dilator therapy is also to **reduce pain with intercourse by keeping the muscles relaxed.**

Dilators are tube-shaped cylinders, usually made of silicone or hard plastic. Dilators vary in size from small to large. A woman can go from using smaller sizes to a larger sized dilator as she learns to relax the pelvic floor muscles and gradually expands vaginal capacity.

Many women discuss this issue with their gynecologist and get a prescription for the dilators. Dilators can also be purchased over the counter. A physical therapist with expertise in pelvic floor rehabilitation can help you learn how to use them.

# Sexual Recovery

## Penile Implants



There are two different kinds of penile implants:

- Semi-rigid rod
- Inflatable implant

Each kind of penile implant works differently and has pros and cons. Your healthcare provider will help you pick the best type for you based on:

- Your age
- Your overall health
- Your risk of infection
- Your preference

### Why consider a penile implant?

Although the number of men who get implants is fairly small, implants have been successfully used for many years.

#### **Satisfaction rates are generally high and most men who get the implant say:**

- It improved their sex life
- It allows them to have penetrative sex

#### **Men who get implants:**

- Still have skin sensitivity in the penis
- Can still reach orgasm

#### **Who shouldn't get penile implants?**

Penile implants may not be right for you if you have:

- An infection (for example, ongoing urinary tract infections)
- Un-controlled diabetes
- Erection problems that are temporary

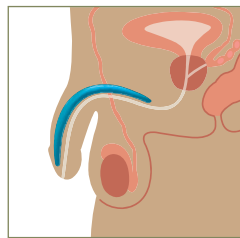
### Include your partner in the decision

If you have a partner, it is important to include them in the discussion and decision making about penile implants. Being sexually active with your implant will affect your partner as well as your relationship.



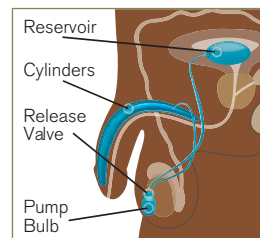
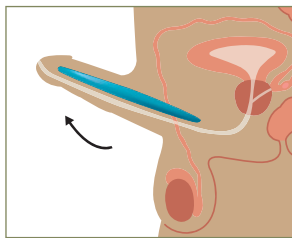
## Sexual Recovery: Penile Implants

### What are the different kinds of penile implants?



#### Semi-rigid rod

This penile implant is bent upwards for sex and toward the body for concealment under clothing.



#### Three-piece penile implant

This implant consists of inflatable cylinders inside the shaft of the penis, a fluid reservoir under the abdominal wall, and a pump inside the scrotum.

#### Non-inflatable implant (Semi-rigid rod)

##### Pros:

- Easy to implant
- No risk of mechanical breakdown
- Easy to use

##### Cons:

- Your penis will be firm all the time
- Can be difficult to hide erection under clothing

#### Inflatable Implant

##### Pros

- Mimics a natural erection: Your penis will be soft when the implant is deflated and firm when the implant is inflated.

##### Cons

- Has more parts than a non-inflatable implant so there is a higher risk of mechanical breakdown.
- May be harder to use than the semi-rigid rod for men who have arthritis in their hands.

### What are the risks?

Because penile implants involve surgery, men need to weigh the risks and benefits for themselves before deciding. Once a penile prosthesis is put in, you may lose your natural erection reflex. This means that if the prosthesis is removed, you will not be able to get a natural erection again.

Risks of penile implant surgery include:

#### Injury during surgery

- During surgery, it is possible to have injuries to your urethra, bladder, or other organs.

#### Infection after surgery

- Infection is possible after surgery. You may have higher risk of infection if you have a spinal cord injury or diabetes.

#### Implant problems

- For inflatable implants, you may be able to feel the fluid-filled reservoir after it is placed in your stomach area.

#### Rare problems

- In rare cases, penile implants can break. If that happens, you will need another surgery remove, fix or replace a broken implant.
- In some cases, an implant might wear away the skin from inside the penis. Rarely, an implant can break through the skin.



# Sexual Recovery

## Sensate Focus Exercises



After prostate cancer, there are exercises that can help you and your partner reconnect sexually.

Sensate Focus Exercises were developed by sexual health researchers in the 1960s, William Masters and Virginia Johnson.

A sensate focus exercise includes physical closeness and both verbal and non-verbal communication between partners.

Couples tell each other what areas of the body they like to have caressed. They can be as small as hands, face, feet. Partners take turns touching, or gently massaging that area. The idea is for the “toucher” to enjoy the touch and for the “touchee” to enjoy being touched.

It's important to NOT engage in sexual activity during or immediately after these exercises to preserve a non-pressured atmosphere. In these exercises, the focus is on the pleasure of touching and being touched, not on performance. Of course, you or your partner may become aroused. In order to preserve the non-pressured atmosphere, engage in sexual activity at another time.

## How It's Done

Sensate focus exercises are typically divided into two phases.

### Phase 1

**Start by defining the area of the body where you want to begin. Avoid genitals and sexually sensitive areas like nipples (or others that you can identify on your own body).**

Once you become comfortable with the initial area, enlarge it. Gradually touch larger areas of the body until the whole body becomes accessible. **This can take several weeks.** Don't rush, stay focused, non-pressured, friendly.

- Try to be as quiet as possible so you do not take away from the awareness of physical sensations.
- Do not think of it as therapeutic massage. It is intended just to increase one's awareness and to create pleasurable sensation, not to fix a problem.



## Getting Ready

Try the ideas below to prepare for a more sensual experience.

### Prepare your environment.

Choose a private environment. Use candles, music, scents, or whatever else makes you and your partner feel relaxed. Keep the room warm enough that you're both comfortable.

### Make time.

Set aside about an hour for your "dates". Each one can be broken up with different exercises. It's important to choose a time when you will not be interrupted.

### Find your comfort zone.

Uncover the area that you decided you feel comfortable uncovering. Some people are immediately comfortable being naked together. Others prefer to start being partially clothed. It is fine to start with small, uncovered areas to see how it works.

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## Phase 2

### During this phase, you can begin to move into generating pleasure.

Talk about it with each other first so that you know where to start. It could be stroking feet, the stomach, again, begin with non-sexual areas.

Talk at the end of each exercise to tell each other what felt good. Decide, by talking, where you'll go next.

Continue to use sensate touch and pleasure-inducing touch to keep your whole body a part of the sensual and eventually sexual experience.

After you have identified pleasurable areas all around each other's body, move towards touching sexually sensitive areas other than genitals.

- This can take 2 or 3 weeks of twice a week activity.
- Gradually move towards pleasuring genitals.

## Your Roles

Each of you will have a role to begin your sensate exercises, then switch. One will start out as the partner who will be touched. The other will be the one touching. Before going into your first encounter, decide who will be participating in each role first.

### If you are the "toucher", focus on:

- Your own experience of touching (the temperature of your partner's body, the amount of pressure you're exerting, the texture of your partner's skin or hair), and
- Managing distractions (automatic thoughts, feelings, etc). Always keep bringing attention back by focusing on what your touch feels like to you.

### The "touchee" focuses on:

- The experience of being touched (temperature, pressure, texture), and
- Moving or redirecting the toucher's hand if sensation is uncomfortable in any way. When the toucher is ready, they say "switch".

## Your First Exercise

This brief activity is meant to give you an introductory experience of what it's like to participate in sensate focus exercises.

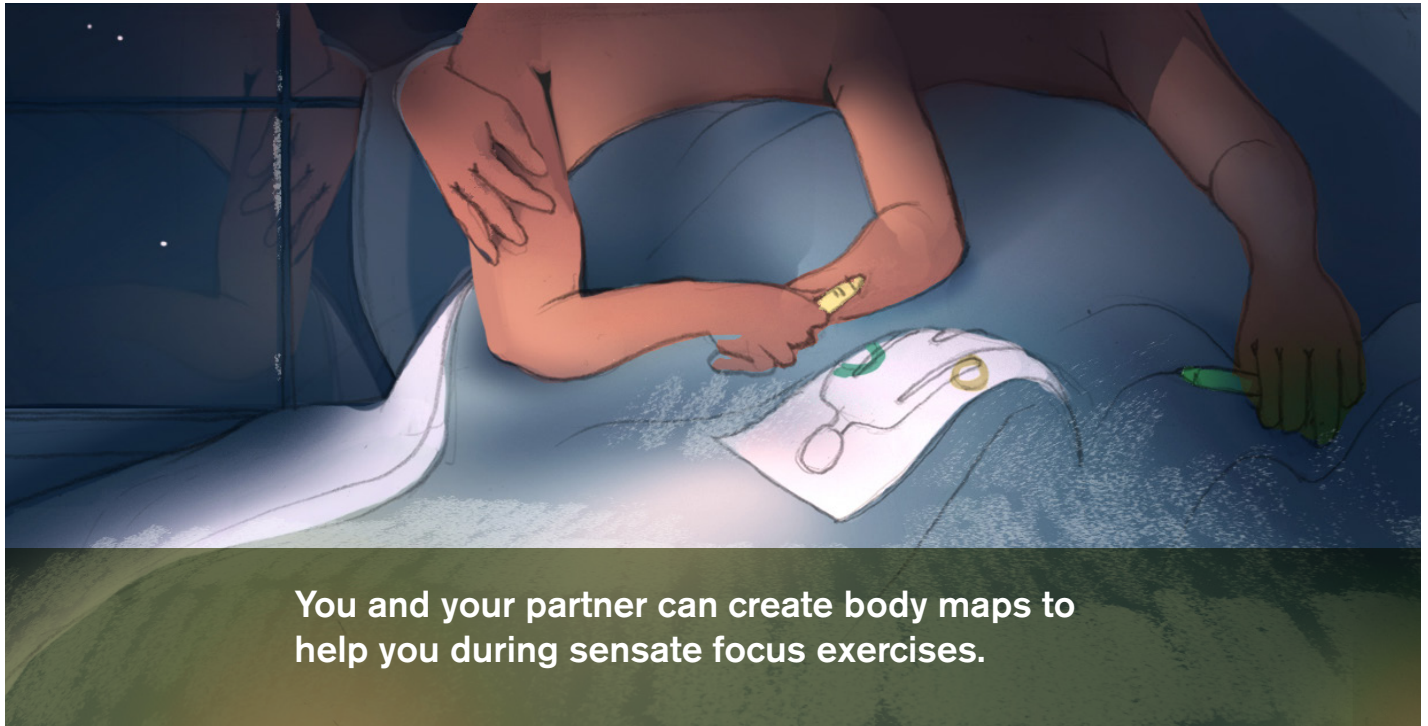
- Begin by sitting in a comfortable position, facing each other.
- One of you start by massaging the other person's hands for 5 minutes.
- Take a few minutes to discuss what you enjoyed about the experience.
- What did it feel like to touch and be touched?
- Next, switch roles and repeat.

Use this exercise to get you started, then expand to other areas as you get comfortable.



# Sexual Recovery

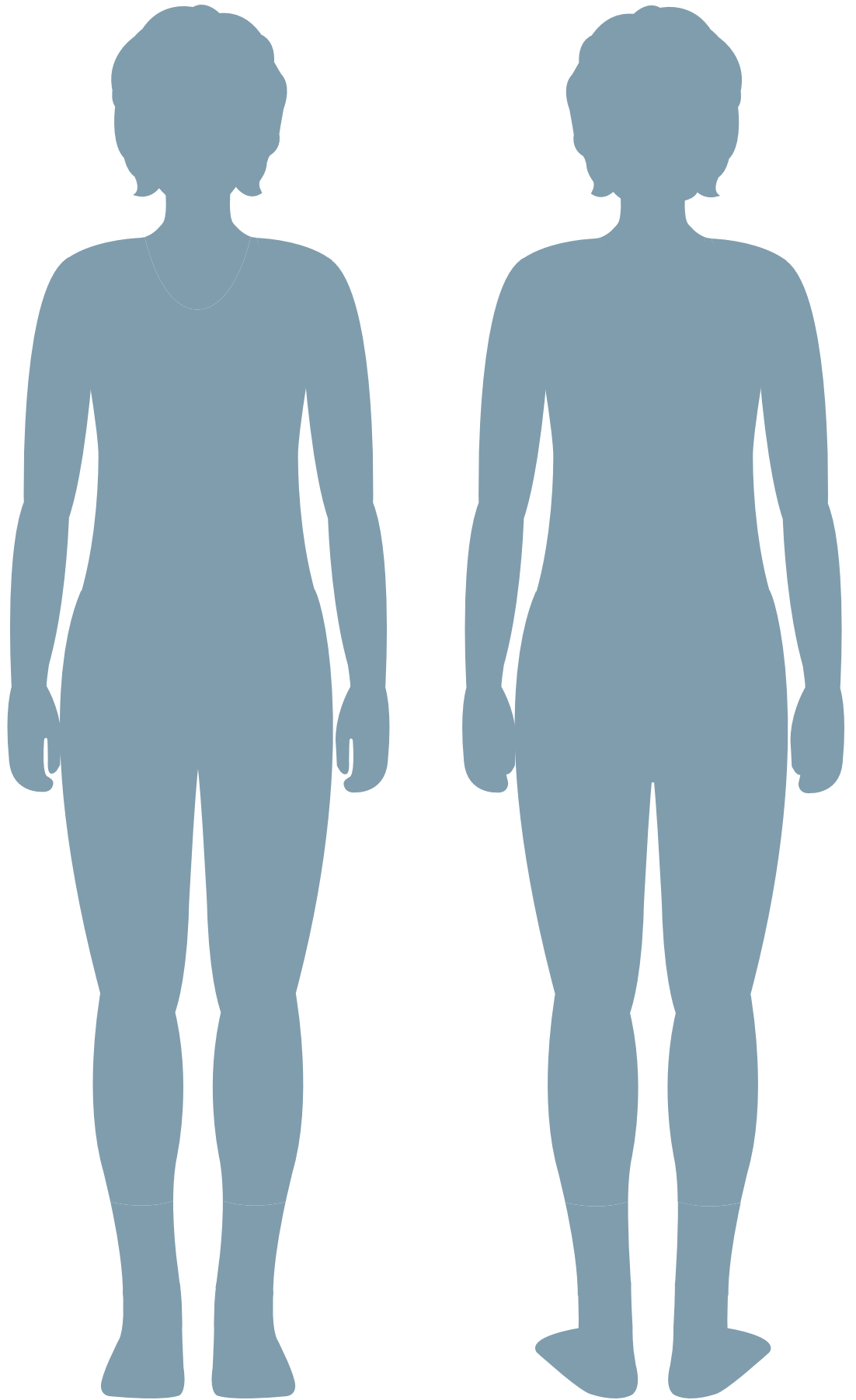
## Sensate Focus Exercises: Body Mapping

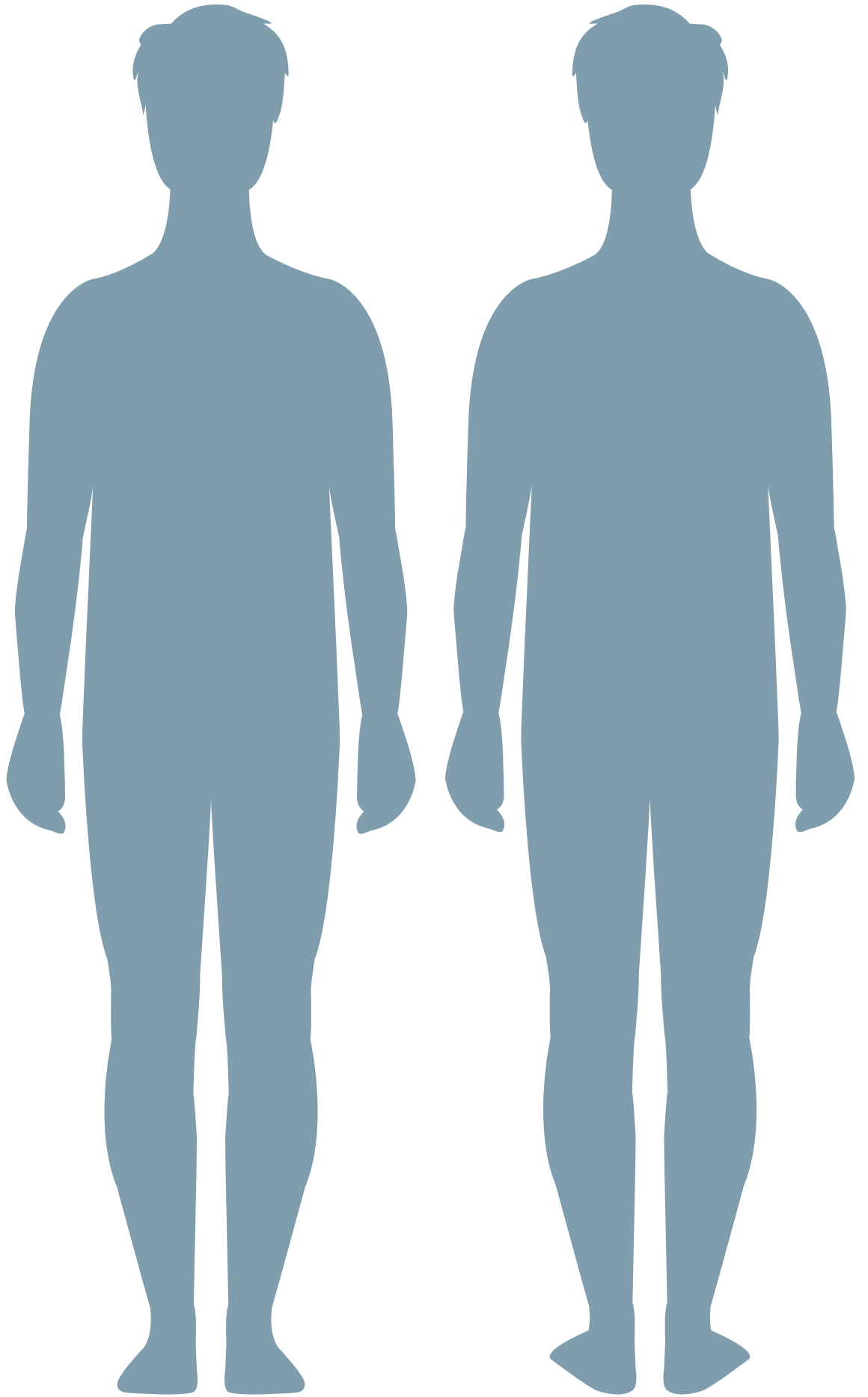


You and your partner can create body maps to help you during sensate focus exercises.

### How to do Body Mapping

- Print out appropriate maps from the following pages.
- Draw on your map to show the areas of your body you want your partner to touch.
- As you gradually increase the areas over time, reprint and update your body maps.





# Sexual Recovery

## Sex After Prostate Cancer



**After prostate cancer treatment, most men want to get back to being sexually active.**

After prostate cancer treatment, men usually have difficulties with having sex the way they're used to. Erections don't work well, libido may be low, and couples realize that their familiar ways of making love don't work. Many men and couples want to recover their sex lives even when the body does not work as well. They want to gain confidence in making love in a new way. We call that 'sexual recovery.'

### What is sexual recovery?

Most men who go through prostate cancer treatment don't get back to where they were in terms of ability to have erections. Even so, many couples can get back to being sexually active and feeling satisfied with their sex lives. Learning how to use sexual aids and relying on personal and relationship strengths can help make it work.

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### Things might not come naturally at first, but there may be benefits.

When sex becomes 'work', you may feel like giving up. This is a normal part of grieving, and can be overcome. Remember that you're learning new ways to be intimate and it's an adjustment, but you can get through

it. Some couples say that working together on how to make their sexual relationships work in this new situation has helped them become emotionally closer which in turn makes sex better.





## Sexual Recovery: Sex After Prostate Cancer

### What might get in your way?

- Recovery takes time.** It's important to have realistic expectations about your recovery. If you're overly optimistic, you may feel disappointment. Remember that recovery is a process that takes time.
- Change is difficult.** At first, you may feel uncomfortable with using sexual aids. You may feel angry that you have to use the aids to have sex. You may also feel upset that sex is less spontaneous. This will get better with time. Getting familiar with the sexual aids will help you stay on track with penile rehabilitation, and feel more confident during sex.
- It affects both the man and the partner.** You may feel like you're letting your partner down. Partners may be unsure about how to help, how to talk about sex, and may feel guilty about their own desire to be sexual. Try to be patient with one another as you get through the process.

### Here are some initial steps in that have helped men and couples in their sexual recovery:

