

## Between the Sheets...

April 2019

This column provides the platform for experts in the field to help men and women by providing answers to questions about sexual health and intimacy challenges that can result from prostate cancer treatment.

This column was compiled with the help of Dr. Jeffrey Albaugh, Director of Sexual Health at NorthShore University HealthSystem and at Jesse Brown VA Medical Center in Chicago, IL. Dr. Albaugh is a funded researcher, a board certified advanced practice urology clinical nurse specialist, and a board certified sexuality counselor. In addition to his many publications in peer reviewed journals and chapters in books on sexual dysfunction, Dr. Albaugh published *Reclaiming Sex and Intimacy After Prostate Cancer Treatment*. He has been quoted in media and publications as an expert in the treatment of sexual dysfunction, and is a member of the Us TOO Board of Directors.

### QUESTION FROM PROSTATE CANCER SURVIVOR:

*I like this new Between the Sheets feature. In 2008, I had radiation seeds implanted. My PSA has been near 0 since then. Until about six months ago, using the pump produced acceptable length and hardness. Since then, at age 79, there is usually insufficient length and hardness. Question: Should I expect the same effects as RP (radical prostatectomy) surgery as described in the Jan 2019 Between the Sheets? I am just about ready to begin "the pill." Any extra effects from the pill that I should be aware of?*

### RESPONSE FROM DR. JEFFREY ALBAUGH:

*Thank you for your support for the column and for your question. I would not expect you to have the same issues with orgasm as described after radical prostatectomy this many years (more than a decade) after your radiation therapy. It is interesting that you have had pretty good results using the vacuum device for erections and length until six months ago. Make sure your vacuum device is still working properly to produce the suction needed to pull the blood in your penis. The device can stop working completely or partially and maybe you need a new device (especially if it is the original one you have been using for over 10 years). We do sometimes have men use the vacuum device daily for stretching the tissue and blood filling without the tension ring beginning about a month after the radical prostatectomy surgery. This may be helpful with preserving/restoring length when used in that early post operative period, as suggested from a few small research studies. The recommendation is to have men use the device daily for about 10-20 minutes for stretching without the ring. The goal is to create a painless, even erection that lifts off the cylinder within the device for about 1-2 minutes each time, repeating the sequence 5-10 times. Work with the device during each sequence doing multiple releases and adjustments, as needed (releasing each time it is hurting at all, if it is getting fatter at the base, or pulling in other tissue), until the penis lifts off the cylinder within the cylinder. It can be helpful to work with an expert on the pump to learn to get these even, painless, lifted off erections. Sometimes the expert may be a representative from the vacuum device company or a healthcare professional (for example a nurse or medical assistant).*

*If you can get any fullness or hardness with stimulation, it is very helpful to start with that, rather than when completely flaccid. Many men who find some benefit from the pills will use the pills to get a better erection along with the vacuum device. The pills are taken on an empty stomach about 1-2 hours prior to stimulation and using the vacuum device. It is really helpful to start with any penile fullness or hardness that you can get. If you get harder with the pills, you can put that semi-hard or full penis in the pump, and it already has some more blood in there and will usually fill that much easier with the vacuum device. Many men have minimal side effects from the pills (sildenafil, vardenafil, tadalafil and avanafil). The most common are typically headache, nasal stuffiness, facial flushing and stomach upset. Some people get blue halos around lights with sildenafil or muscle aches with tadalafil. Very few people stop the pills related to intolerable side effects, but everyone is different, so it is difficult to say if you will have any unwanted side effects. I hope it goes well and you have minimal to no side effects with a positive effect on your erections. Remember to take the pill on an empty stomach (1 hour prior to or 2 hours after a meal). The peak effect of sildenafil, vardenafil and tadalafil usually takes about 60-90 minutes after taking it on an empty stomach. Remember, generic versions of sildenafil and tadalafil are now available and can be much less expensive.*

*You can access the new edition of my book or download a free copy of my original book at [www.drjeffalbaugh.com](http://www.drjeffalbaugh.com).*

Watch Dr. Albaugh's presentation on sexual health and intimacy from the *Prostate Cancer Pathways for Patients and Caregivers* event recorded at NorthShore University HealthSystem in Skokie, IL on November 3, 2018 at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hiq0dDEb1I0&t=4483s>.

Read previous issues of *Between the Sheets* at [www.ustoo.org/BTS](http://www.ustoo.org/BTS).

Do you have a question about sexual health or intimacy? If so, we invite you to send it to Us TOO. We'll select questions to feature in future *Between the Sheets* columns.

**Please email your question to: [ustooBTS@ustoo.org](mailto:ustooBTS@ustoo.org)**

**Or mail your letter to:**  
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