

Between the Sheets...

September 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:

At age 71 I was diagnosed with prostate cancer and had seed implants which were effective. After healing from the implants, I had no erection problems for 6-7 years but then it slowly began to be a problem. Viagra and Cialis were helpful, somewhat, for a while but then even those did not help. The frustrating and strange thing is I still wake up numerous times at night with erections. Articles about ED seem to center around blood flow to the penis or psychological problems. Are sleep time erections created from blood flow or some other function? If blood flow, why the problem during sexual activities but not during sleep?

RESPONSE FROM DR. JEFFREY ALBAUGH:

Thank you for your question. All erections, including night time erections, are the result of blood filling the penis. Your penis literally works out while you sleep to keep erections in shape. It is a good sign you are still getting nocturnal erections, even though they might not happen as often or be as strong as when erections were working well. Erectile function requires nervous conduction (communication) between your brain and penis and blood flow to engorge the penis. You continue to struggle during sex with a partner with your erectile dysfunction and that is probably due to multiple factors. You are nearly 80 years old now and many medical conditions can impact erectile function as you age, including: high blood pressure, elevated cholesterol, coronary artery disease, diabetes, obesity, chronic spinal disc issues, neurologic disorders or sleep disorders. Most of the men in your age group have erectile dysfunction due to the many medical conditions that may occur by the time you are nearing 80 years old. In addition, the anxiety over possibly losing erections or pleasing a partner can negatively impact erections. If we were able to completely track your night time erections over the years, they have probably diminished in frequency and quality over time, along with the diminished erectile function with your partner. We have no way of knowing how the night time erections differ now versus when things were working right, but it is still a good sign you do get numerous night time erections. Blood is flowing to your penis, but the frustrating thing is that it is not consistently doing that when you are trying to have sex, and that is likely due to both physical and psychological factors. Keeping your mind focused and staying present with your partner, while not worrying, can be very important to erectile function with a partner. Enjoying sex regardless of erections can make a big difference. If you are not hard enough for intercourse, enjoy oral stimulation, manual stimulation and/or vibratory stimulation of the genitals together (outercourse). If you are hard enough, you can enjoy intercourse. The anxiety will bring down the erections with the blood going back into your body. There are also other treatments for erectile dysfunction, if and when pills are not working. I hope this information is helpful to you and others in the journey towards health.

You can access the new edition of my book or download a free copy of my original book at 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.

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

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