

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. Anne Katz, Certified Sexuality Counselor and Clinical Nurse Specialist at CancerCare Manitoba. She has educated thousands of healthcare providers and cancer survivors about cancer, sexuality and survivorship. She is the editor of the Oncology Nursing Forum, an avid blogger for ASCO Connections, and the author of 13 books on the topics of illness, sexuality and cancer survivorship. ([www.drannekatz.com](http://www.drannekatz.com))

### QUESTION FROM PROSTATE CANCER SURVIVOR:

*I got a prescription from my family doctor for Viagra but it doesn't work at all. I had my prostate removed about six months ago and I sailed through the surgery. I'm 60 years old and I was assured that everything would work as normal after the surgery. Is it me or am I missing something here?*

### RESPONSE FROM DR. ANNE KATZ:

*You are not missing anything here, other than education and support! When I see men in a very similar situation I ask some important questions:*

#### 1. How are you taking the medication (Viagra)?

*This sounds like a really stupid question I know and many men look at me and state "By mouth of course!" But that is not what I am asking. What I want to know is if the man is taking the medication correctly as in:*

- *Waiting one hour before attempting to get an erection*
- *Using genital stimulation to get blood into the penis*

*This is important because (a) the medication needs time to be absorbed into the circulation and (b) there needs to be genital stimulation. Viagra and other medications like this do NOT cause an erection; they merely prevent blood from leaving the penis by contracting the veins that allow blood to leave the penis.*

#### 2. What were your erections like BEFORE the surgery?

*Men who were having problems before surgery are not going to see improvements in their erectile functioning. If the man had some degree of erectile problems before surgery, surgery is going to make things worse.*

#### 3. What other medications and/or recreational drugs are you taking?

*Many medications commonly prescribed to men in their 50s and 60s and beyond cause erectile difficulties. These include medications for high blood pressure, depression and/or anxiety, diabetes, anti-histamines, anti-inflammatories, muscle relaxants and others used for more rare diseases. For a complete list see:*

*<https://www.webmd.com/erectile-dysfunction/guide/drugs-linked-erectile-dysfunction>. Cannabis, Ecstasy, cocaine, opiates and alcohol also affect erections.*

#### 4. How anxious are you about regaining erections?

*The answer to this is often "highly anxious" for any number of reasons! The more anxious the man is about getting back to "normal," the more likely he is to have performance anxiety. The man has lost confidence in his ability to either achieve or maintain even a partial erection and this leads to a vicious cycle of self-doubt and failure. It is very difficult, however, to stop that little voice in his head that tells him that things are not going to work again...*

*It can take up to two years for erectile function to return so patience and practice is needed. A man has to take any of the erectile medications on five to eight separate occasions before we can say that it's the medication that is not working. And he should then try one of the other similar medications. If the oral medications don't work, there are other options including penile self-injection that is highly effective.*

Watch Dr. Katz' presentation on sexual health and intimacy from the Prostate Cancer Pathways for Patients and Caregivers event recorded at Englewood Health in Englewood, NJ on September 29, 2018.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A2ZdDHw2WGY&t=8542s>.

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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