

Between the Sheets...

Prostate cancer treatment can be life-saving. But the aftermath of treatment side effects can have a devastating impact on the quality of life for a man and his partner. The common side effects of erectile dysfunction (ED) and incontinence can be temporary or ongoing. Regardless of the duration, they pose a challenge to maintaining a satisfying sex life that may be part of a couple's intimate relationship. Without acknowledgement and resolution, these issues can develop into a wedge that can fracture a couple's physical and emotional bond at a point when it needs to be strong and sustainable.

The value of Us TOO is in addressing the unmet or underserved needs of the prostate cancer community. Based on recent survey results from Us TOO support group leaders across the country, we recognize the need to address the impact that prostate cancer has on sexual health and intimacy. In addition to updated content on the Us TOO website, we are pleased to introduce *Between the Sheets* as a new, regular feature of the Us TOO *Hot SHEET* newsletter.

This column will provide 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.

Our first 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)

Dr. Katz will be a featured presenter at the *Prostate Cancer Pathways for Patients and Caregivers* event and webcast in Englewood, NJ, on Saturday, September 29. (See the event ad on the opposite side of this sheet. Register at www.mainstreamchicago.com/ustoo-pathways-new-jersey).

QUESTION FROM PROSTATE CANCER SURVIVOR:

When I received my prostate cancer diagnosis, my wife was my rock as we met with the doctor and decided on treatment. I'm now struggling with managing post-treatment side effects of ED and incontinence. It's taking a toll on our marriage and my sense of being a man. While I have never loved her more, I'm not able to perform sexually like I used to and we don't talk about it. It pains me that we're not able to be intimate and I sense that she's withdrawing from me. How do we move forward?

RESPONSE FROM DR. ANNE KATZ:

This is a common problem - the sexual changes as well as incontinence - but also the feelings you are experiencing about your relationship and how you see yourself as a man. Sexuality is an important component of male self-esteem and self-image, and changes in this area often precipitate a crisis of confidence.

Men often use sex as a way of showing their love for their partner, but when problems occur - such as after treatment for prostate cancer - they have trouble finding ways to express this. You have included this in your question: "We don't talk about it."

Relationships are dependent on communication especially when there is a challenge, such as loss of sexual function. When you don't talk about what is going on (or what is NOT happening!), the other person starts to make assumptions, just as you are doing when you say that you sense that your spouse is withdrawing. She may be keeping her distance because she doesn't want you to think that she is initiating something sexual and you will be upset if you can't respond like before. She may be withdrawing because she is trying to protect herself - and you! She may be blaming herself for something and thinks that YOU are avoiding her because you are not doing what you would normally do to create and maintain the connectedness that is the true meaning of intimacy and is the result for many couples of coming together sexually.

Pssst!
Check out our new
feature on sex and intimacy,
Between the Sheets...

How can you move forward? It's simple, but complex - YOU NEED TO TALK TO EACH OTHER, OPENLY AND HONESTLY. She needs to know what you are thinking and feeling and how you are interpreting her reactions and response to you. You need to listen (and believe) what she tells you about her thoughts and feelings. You both need to lean in TOWARDS each other just as you did when you were learning about your diagnosis and treatment options. If you can't talk to each other without help, then find some help - a couple's counselor or marriage therapist or sex therapist can help you to talk in a safe environment. Once you have talked you can then discuss WHAT you want to do about the situation - explore medical therapies that may help with erections, pelvic floor physiotherapy for the incontinence, or other ways of experiencing sexual pleasure that do not require an erection. The key element is that you have to SHARE and do this TOGETHER.

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

Or mail your letter to:

Us TOO International
Between the Sheets
2720 S. River Road, Suite 112
Des Plaines, IL 0018



This event will feature a special presentation on sex and intimacy related to prostate cancer with Dr. Anne Katz, Certified Sexuality Counselor and author



- ✓ Men's health
- ✓ Overview on prostate cancer
- ♥ Sex and intimacy related to prostate cancer
- ✓ Content for newly diagnosed, recurring, and advanced patients

Presenters: Dr. Anne Katz of CancerCare Manitoba; Dr. Stacy Loeb of NYU Langone Health; Dr. Charles G. Drake of the Herbert Irving Comprehensive Cancer Center; and Dr. Mazyar Ghanaat of Englewood Health



Prostate Cancer Pathways for Patients and Caregivers

*an Educational Event
& Webcast Series from*

Us TOO
Prostate Cancer
SUPPORT - EDUCATION - ADVOCACY

Saturday, September 29
Englewood Hospital
Chiang Auditorium
350 Engle Street
Englewood, NJ 07631

The event will be webcast live on the internet for those unable to attend in person.

To register, visit:

www.mainstreamchicago.com/ustoo-pathways-new-jersey
or contact Terri at 877-978-7866 or terril@ustoo.org.