

Sexual Health for Hematology/Oncology Patients

Self-care and precautions

This handout gives information for you and your partner about sexual health and activity while you are being treated for cancer. If you have any questions, ask your doctor or nurse.

Staying Safe

- Wash your hands before and after sexual activity.
- Urinate after having sex. This rinses out bacteria that may cause infection in your urinary tract.
- Avoid sexual contact with people who have infectious diseases such as a cold or the flu, cold sores, or sexually transmitted infections.



Talk with your doctor or nurse if you have any questions about sexual activity during your treatment.

When should I talk with my doctor or nurse?

Be sure to talk with your doctor or nurse if you feel:

- Fearful about sexual activity
- A lack of desire

Physical Symptoms

It is also very important to report physical symptoms to your doctor.

Women should report these symptoms:

- Dry vagina or vaginal discharge
- Hot flashes
- Pain, discomfort, or bleeding during or after intercourse

Men should report these symptoms:

- Pelvic or rectal pain
- Pain during ejaculation

Precautions

Chemotherapy drugs can be found in your body's fluids. While you are receiving chemotherapy, use safety precautions for any sexual activity. This includes:

- **Open-mouth kissing** where saliva is exchanged, both while you are receiving chemotherapy and for 48 hours after you are done with your treatment.
- **Oral sex:** If you have oral sex, use a condom, female condom, or dental dam. If you are sensitive to latex, please choose a latex-free product. Clean genitals before and after oral sex to reduce risk of infection.

Dental dams can be found online at these websites:

- www.sheboptheshop.com/safer-sex-dental-dams
- www.babeland.com/mobile/product/detail/1710
- www.amazon.com/Hot-Dam-Non-Latex-Dental-Dams/dp/B004W47MH4

- **Anal sex:** If you have anal sex, use condoms and a water-based lubricant. These help prevent infection and tissue irritation.

After receiving chemotherapy:

- Wait at least 48 hours before any sexual activity.
- Wear a condom or use a dental dam for 7 days after your last dose of chemotherapy.

Other Recommendations

- Use water-based lubricating gel to keep your vagina or rectum from being irritated.
- Use latex condoms, dental dams, or other barrier protection when having sex. This includes all sexual activity, including oral, anal, and vaginal sex.

Are there times when sexual activity is restricted?

Sexual activity is restricted when:

- Your platelet counts are less than 50,000. This is due to the risk of bleeding.
- Your white blood counts are low. Your neutrophil count (ANC) should be more than 500 to avoid risk of infection.
- You have vaginal or rectal bleeding, or you have sores in your mouth, vagina, or rectum.

- Do **not** have anal sex if:
 - Your platelet count is less than 50,000
 - Your ANC is less than 1,000
 - You have bleeding, diarrhea, hemorrhoids, anal fissures, or tears

How can I learn more?

Read these cancer and sexual health resources to learn more:

- SCCA Patient Care Manual: “Sexuality,” page 96
- Books by Dr. Anne Katz, available at the SCCA Resource Center or online at www.drannekatz.com:
 - *Man Cancer Sex*
 - *Woman Cancer Sex*
 - *This Should Not Be Happening: Young Adults with Cancer*
- National Cancer Institute, www.cancer.gov: Search for “sexuality”
- The American Cancer Society, www.cancer.org: Search for “sexuality”
- Livestrong, www.livestrong.org

Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or healthcare provider if you have questions or concerns.