

Sexual Health and Prostate Cancer: Men Who Have Sex with Men

Your sexual identity and relationships are important. They need to be respected during your prostate cancer journey. You have unique experiences that reflect your health care history, sexual practices, values, identities, and roles.

As a general term, we are using “men who have sex with men” or MSM, to include people who may identify as gay, homosexual, bisexual, two-spirited, transgender, or other, and who may be wondering about how prostate cancer and treatment may affect their sexual experiences.

Side effects from prostate cancer treatments can create sexual challenges for MSM. The experience of prostate cancer can also create new ways to explore sexual pleasure, either alone or with another person. Think about what is sexually important to you and ways that you might meet your sexual needs and desires. Talk to your healthcare team about managing your side effects and their impact on your sexual and mental health.

Your Healthcare Team

Feeling comfortable and confident with your healthcare team is important. It’s your decision if you would like to share your sexual orientation. Sharing this information can help you get the care you need.

Sexual Changes

There can be many sexual changes from prostate cancer treatment. These sexual changes can affect you in many ways. This depends on your thoughts around sex, sensuality, and intimacy.

Erectile dysfunction

Erectile dysfunction (ED) is when a person is unable to form or keep an erection. If erections are important in your sexual practices, there are ways to help you have erections. This includes pills, injections, vacuum erection devices, or penile implants. Talk to your sexual health clinician or doctor about your options.

Ejaculation and orgasm

Ejaculation (“coming” or “cumming”) is the release of fluid from the penis when being sexual. For some people, this is very important. After prostate cancer treatment, ejaculation may happen less or not at all. It’s important to understand that you can still have sexual pleasure and orgasm without ejaculation.

Anal sensation

For many men, the prostate can be a source of sexual pleasure. If you prefer to be the receptive partner (“bottom”) during anal sex, you may notice these sensations change after prostate cancer treatment. For some men, they may decide to switch their sexual roles; becoming a “top” if they were a “bottom” before treatment. If you are thinking about changing sexual roles, it is important to know how that makes you feel and how to safely take on that role. Your sexual health clinician, counsellor or sex therapist can support you.

Bowel side effects

Prostate cancer treatment can cause many temporary bowel side effects, including:

- bowel urgency (you have an immediate need to “poop”)
- cramps
- diarrhea (loose or watery “poop”)
- fecal incontinence (you cannot hold in your “poop”)

These side effects can change your sexual experience, especially if you are the receptive partner. After treatment, talk to your doctor before doing any sexual activities involving your rectum (“bum”) or lower bowel. Your doctor will let you know if it is safe to do this.

Urinary side effects

Prostate cancer treatment can cause

- urinary urgency (you have an immediate need to “pee”)
- increased frequency (you have to “pee” more often)
- involuntary leakage of urine (when “pee” leaks out and you cannot control it)

You may leak urine (“pee”) during sexual activity. If you leak urine when you orgasm, this is called climacturia. Urinary side effects last for different amounts of time. Each person is different. Talk to your healthcare team if this is a concern for you.

Lower sex drive (libido):

This is a common side effect of prostate cancer treatment. Understanding the factors causing your decreased sex drive can be helpful in maintaining a healthy sex life (for example: prostate cancer treatment, stress, and anxiety can all decrease your libido). Try bringing more sensuality into your sexual life. You can do this by being more mindful or present during your sexual experiences. Use all of your senses to enjoy the experience. You can experience sensuality when you take a bath, enjoy a massage, or hug your partner. There are many ways to enjoy being sensual. Ask about our sensate focus exercise.

Body image

Prostate cancer treatment may affect how you see your body and your sexual self. Some men may not feel attractive or worry about their sexual performance. Some men may feel that not engaging in sex the way they used to changes how they feel about themselves or their identity. These feelings are common and valid. To help you manage this, you can ask advice from your healthcare team, join a support group, and talk about your concerns with people you trust.

Fertility

Prostate cancer treatments can affect your ability to make sperm and have children. If you are planning on having children in the future, it is important to talk to your doctor before your cancer treatment.

HIV and Prostate Cancer

If you are HIV positive and are diagnosed with prostate cancer, talk to your healthcare team. They may change your treatment plan to make sure you are getting the safest treatment.

Where can I find more information?

1. **Prostate Cancer Canada:**
www.prostatecancer.ca/Prostate-Cancer/Facing-Prostate-Cancer/Gay-and-Bisexual-Men-Prostate-Cancer
2. **Prostate Cancer Foundation of Australia:**
www.prostate.org.au/awareness/for-recently-diagnosed-men-and-their-families/gay-and-bisexual-men/
3. **Health Initiative for Men:**
checkhimout.ca/
4. **TRANS CARE BC:**
www.phsa.ca/our-services/programs-services/trans-care-bc



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