

Sexual and Fertility Changes in Women



“Talk with your doctor before you start treatment. Ask how chemotherapy could affect your ability to have children.”

Chemotherapy can harm an unborn baby (fetus). Ask what birth control methods you or your partner should use.

Ask what changes you may have.

Talk with your doctor or nurse **before treatment starts** to learn what sexual changes or changes to your fertility you may have.

The changes you may have depend on the kind of chemotherapy you’ll be getting and the type of cancer you have. Your age and other health issues are also important.

Questions from women about sexual problems:

What sexual problems might I have?

You might have:

- Dryness or itchy feeling in the vagina
- Hot flashes
- Infections of the vagina or bladder
- Periods that are not regular or no periods (menstruation)
- Stress, fatigue, or little interest in sex

Talk with your doctor or nurse to learn how to manage these changes. Ask how they can be treated and how long these problems may last.



Tips from other women:



“Hot flashes were easier to handle when I carried a small hand fan. I also wore a short-sleeved shirt under my sweater, so I could take my sweater off during a hot flash.”



“I used a cream to help with vaginal dryness, and I used a lubricant to feel more comfortable when I had sex.”

Ask your nurse what products or brands can help.

How can I get help to cope?

Be open and honest with your partner. Talk about your feelings and concerns. Find new ways to show love and be close. It may also help to talk with a doctor, nurse, social worker, counselor, or people in a support group.

Do I need to use birth control?

Yes, all women who have not gone through menopause should use birth control. Or their partner should use a method of birth control. Talk with your doctor or nurse to learn what you should do. **Don't get pregnant during treatment**, because it can harm an unborn baby (fetus).

Questions from women about changes in fertility:

Will I be able to have children after treatment?

If you would like to have children, talk with your doctor **before you start treatment**. Your doctor can talk with you about your choices and refer you to a fertility specialist.

Talk with your doctor or nurse to learn about special instructions to follow.

Questions to ask your doctor or nurse:

1. What problems should I call you about?
2. What can help with sexual problems?
3. Can you give me the name of a social worker or counselor who I can talk with?
4. What birth control method would you suggest that my partner or I use?
5. What can I do now if I would like to have children in the future?
6. Can you give me the name of a fertility specialist who can tell me more?
7. After treatment is over, how long do I need to keep using birth control?

FREE SERVICES TO LEARN MORE

National Cancer Institute Cancer Information Service

Phone: 1-800-4-CANCER (1-800-422-6237)
TTY: 1-800-332-8615
Online: www.cancer.gov
Chat Online: www.cancer.gov/help



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