The Impact Cancer Can Have on Relationships

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Cancer and Relationships

A cancer diagnosis affects not only the sufferer, but the spouse as well, and the marriage. Both of you may experience sadness, grief, and anxiety. The best way to keep your relationship strong is to not let cancer control your life, to understand the changes and adapt to these changes.

How Does Cancer Affect My Relationship?

In a marriage or relationship, each partner has a role, and an illness like cancer may change the roles. If you are the cancer sufferer and you have always been in charge and acted as the main provider, you may struggle now to let your spouse provide support.

Your partner may also become overprotective, trying to help you. It is important to communicate openly, re-evaluate your needs and wants in the relationship, and stay flexible. Make a plan.

If you need to take some time off work, your spouse may need to take another job. A financial planner could also help you find other options to maintain financial stability.

Look at other activities you were responsible to complete such as cooking, cleaning the house or shopping - try to simplify those (i.e. shopping online, buying already prepared foods) or get help from family or close friends.

Communicating Your Needs

Communication is important again. Cancer itself and cancer treatments can significantly affect your sleep, energy levels, and overall mood. You may have days when you find difficult to get dressed or take a shower.

Don’t struggle by yourself or get frustrated, but rather ask your spouse for help. Take care of your emotions and feelings, too. Both of you need to talk and reassure each other that you are loved and support each other emotionally.

The Physical and Emotional Side Effects of Cancer

Cancer can affect your physical and emotional intimacy in so many ways. Symptoms such as depression, fatigue, nausea, erectile dysfunction (or vaginal dryness) all can affect your intimacy. Ignoring this topic would just aggravate the problem.

If you don’t feel comfortable talking about sex with your partner, you should seek a counselor or sex therapist. A healthcare professional can work with both of you together or separate to improve your sex life and maintain intimacy.

Cancer and Physical Intimacy

Since all aspects of the sex cycle are affected (desire, arousal, readiness, orgasm, and resolution), you may want to try different techniques and see which one helps most.

Some couples prefer to hug and cuddle more when the sexual desire is low. Others prefer to engage in one-sided foreplay – if you don't have the desire to have an orgasm, you could still help your partner to achieve one.

If the major problem is with sexual arousal, the solution is to use erectile aids (for men) and lubricants (women).

Sexuality is not just about the physical act of sexual intercourse, it is also about how a person perceives himself or herself and expresses love and care for his or her partner. It is more important to stay flexible, learn new things when the older ones are no longer working, and have fun along the way.