

Sexual Health During and After Cancer Treatment

You should follow special safety guidelines during sex while being treated for cancer with:

- Chemotherapy
- Immunotherapy
- Targeted therapy
- Blood stem cell transplant
- CAR-T therapy
- Radiation therapy

Preventing Pregnancy

Chemotherapy can damage sperm. This could lead to birth defects in a baby, including fetal death. Some patients will need a pregnancy test before starting treatment.

Chemotherapy has risks to the fetus such as:

- Slow fetal growth during pregnancy
- Low blood counts in fetus
- Premature birth
- Fetal defects or death

To avoid pregnancy, use a condom during sex and one other method of birth control.

Trying to get pregnant too soon after the end of treatment may be harmful to the baby.

Talk to a fertility specialist if you have questions about your fertility and having children in the future.

Protecting Yourself

Use a condom during sex to decrease the risk of a sexually transmitted disease or infections. If your platelet count or white blood cell count is low, avoid all sexual activities until your blood counts are normal.

Low white blood counts increase your risk of infection. Low platelet counts increase your risk for excess bleeding and bruising. This may occur during sexual activity.

Avoid oral and anal sex during cancer treatment. The risk of infection and bleeding is higher.

Protecting Your Partner

Chemotherapy, immunotherapy, and targeted therapy are present in your urine, stool, saliva, vomiting, blood, and semen for at least 48 hours after your last treatment. Protect your partner from being exposed to these bodily fluids during oral, vaginal, and anal sex. A condom may provide some protection. Avoiding all sexual activity is the only sure way to protect your partner.

It is safe for you and your partner to share signs of affection and support during your cancer treatment. This can include touching, hugging and kissing.

If you have any questions about your sexual health during and after cancer treatment, ask your doctor or nurse.

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person's health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright ©5/2023. University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing. HF#7875.