

A decorative border of small red hearts surrounds the text.

**Regaining
Sexual Confidence
After Cancer**

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A photograph of a woman with long, curly hair, wearing a white top, with her arms raised in a gesture of triumph or joy. The background is a soft, warm gradient of yellow and green.

**Surviving & Thriving
with Cancer**



Regaining Sexual Confidence After Cancer

Having cancer can affect every aspect of your life, including your sexuality. Whether your treatment has included surgery, chemo-therapy, radiotherapy, or any combination of these or other therapies, you will need to make adjustments in your life as you recover.

Remember that talking honestly with your spouse is important to maintaining a strong, supportive relationship.

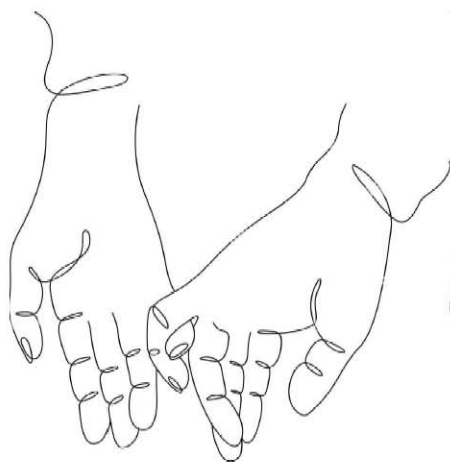
Be patient, be creative.

Your physician can provide you with referrals to professional counsellors experienced in helping patients who have sexual problems following treatment.

The pleasure of sexual closeness enhances quality of life and can be adapted, no matter what treatment has been used.

Talk with your doctor or nurse about any restrictions you may have.

This free seminar booklet contains suggestions to help you and your spouse regain sexual closeness.



Before You Resume Sexual Activity

:} Focus on your physical recovery first. Emphasize nutrition, rest, and a gradual return to regular activity.

:} Include your spouse in all discussions about your care and treatment while you are still in the hospital.

:} Be sure that your hospital discharge instructions include advice about resuming sexual activity. If your nurse or doctor doesn't mention it, feel free to ask.

:} Use birth control, if indicated by your doctor or nurse.

:} You've been through a lot. It may take some time before you are interested in sex again. Be patient with yourself.

:} Report any unusual bleeding, discharge, fever, or pain to your doctor or nurse.



When You Feel Ready

:} Remember that self-concept and sexuality are linked, so emphasize the positive aspects of your appearance and personality.

:} Wear comfortable, attractive lounging clothes and perhaps perfume or cologne, not only to arouse your spouse, but to feel good about yourself.

:} Set the stage for sexual contact by choosing a time when both you and your spouse are rested and free from distractions.

:} A warm shower together allows a couple to begin foreplay in a relaxed way.

:} Chocolates, fruit pieces, or chocolate biscuits to share, with candlelight and music can add to a romantic mood.

:} Mutual massage, not only of the genital area, but of the neck, chest, buttocks, thighs and feet, can be stimulating to both partners.

:} Experiment with positions until you find one that is most comfortable for you. If you are feeling fatigued, try positions that require minimal exertion.

:} Use a water-soluble lubricant (such as K-Y Jelly, Astroglide, or Replens to increase vaginal moisture.

Do not use petroleum jelly (such as Vaseline).

:} Use prescribed pain medication or muscle relaxants, if necessary, to make sexual activity more comfortable.

:} Conserve energy for sexual activity, perhaps by giving certain household chores to others.

:} Explore alternate ways of expressing physical love.

:} Communicate needs and desires so that sexual activity is pleasurable for both you and your spouse.

:} Consider joining a support group, where you will find couples with concerns similar to yours.

:} Consider sexual rehabilitation or sexual counselling if there are physical

or psychological barriers that do not resolve with time.

:} Most important, remember that with some effort by you and your spouse, your sexual life can return to what it was ...or maybe it can be even better.

Changes

**Our lives once had a rhythm
The hectic pace of a busy life
Jobs, travel, children, errands
But always able to return
To the comfort of each other**

**Our rhythm disrupted by illness
The frantic pace of survival
Hospitals, surgery, chemo, radiation
Afraid we would never return
To the comfort of each other**

**A new rhythm out of the chaos
The slow pace back to normalcy
Communication, time, patience, love
The journey back and our return
To the comfort of each other**

— by Sue Grier

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www.lrhartley.com/cancer