

How to Manage

# Sexual Problems



This guide is for men who have had treatment for prostate cancer. The information here is not meant to replace medical advice. For medical advice, speak to your healthcare team.

## Sexual problems after prostate cancer treatment are common.

### Treatments can cause changes in your:

Erections

Orgasms

Ejaculation (when you orgasm)

Fertility

Sexual desire

Feelings and attitudes about sex

### Sexual problems after treatment can be caused by:

**Side effects of treatment:** Things like pain and fatigue can make you less interested in having sex.

**Hormone changes:** Hormonal therapy will cause your testosterone levels to drop. When testosterone levels drop, you will notice that you have less of a sex drive.

**Surgery:** Surgery can change how you get aroused or have an orgasm. If surgery causes sex to be painful, you may avoid having sex.

**Your feelings:** Feelings of fear, anger, guilt, stress, anxiety and sadness are all a normal part of cancer. These feelings can affect your interest in sex and how you feel about your partner.

Talk to your healthcare team about any sexual problems you have.



**Your healthcare team wants to know about your sexual problems so that they can help you find ways to manage symptoms and treat the problem.**

If you have a partner, share your feelings with them. Talking about sexual changes can be good for both of you. You may have to work together to make changes to your sex life so that you can enjoy each other and be intimate.

If you do not have a partner, then talk to a close friend or a professional counsellor. They may be able to help you work through your feelings about sexual changes.

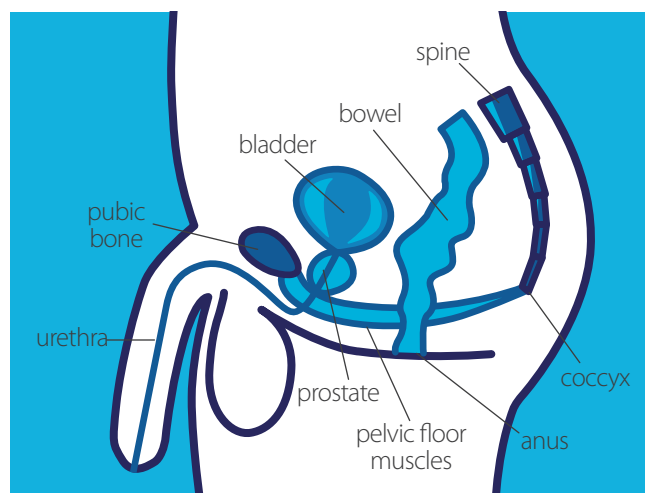
Talking to other men who have had the same experiences can help. Let your healthcare team know if you are interested in joining a support group.

## You can help to manage erectile function.

**Erectile function is the ability of the penis to get and stay hard. Ask your healthcare team for support with any of these self-help measures.**

**Try to have frequent erections.** This helps with blood flow to the penis, and is important even if you are not having sex.

**Massage the penis even if it does not cause an erection.** This will keep your tissues healthy and keep blood flowing to your penis.



**Practice pelvic floor exercises** to strengthen the pelvic floor muscles. These muscles (take a look at the diagram on this page to see where they are) are the muscles you squeeze to help you hold in your urine. To practice pelvic floor muscle exercises, you will need to:

1. Squeeze your pelvic floor muscles.
2. Hold the squeeze for 10 seconds.
3. Relax for 10 seconds.
4. Repeat Steps 2 and 3 up to 10 times.
5. Do a set of 10 exercises 3 to 5 times a day.

If you need or want help with these exercises, ask your healthcare team for support in your next visit.

**Eat well and exercise** to keep your body at a healthy weight.

**Quit smoking.** Smoking makes you more at risk for problems getting an erection. Ask your health care team for help with quitting.

**Cut down** on the amount of alcohol you drink.



**Take medication.** Medication may help you get an erection. Talk to your healthcare team about what medication is best for you and for help managing side effects.

**Use implants and devices:** If medication does not work you may be able to use devices that draw blood into the penis (like a vacuum) to help you get an erection. You can also use these devices if you don't want to take medication. Another option is a penile implant (flexible rods or inflatable tubes inserted into the penis).

## For more information visit the sites below:

### Prostate Cancer Foundation of Australia

Website: [www.prostate.org.au](http://www.prostate.org.au)  
Search term: "Sexual problems"

### Prostate Cancer Canada

Website: [www.prostatecancer.ca](http://www.prostatecancer.ca)  
Search term: "Sexual side effects"