

Between the Sheets...

August 2020

This column provides the platform for experts in the field to help men and women by providing answers to questions about sexual health and intimacy challenges that can result from prostate cancer treatment.

This column was compiled with the help of Dr. Anne Katz, Certified Sexuality Counselor and Clinical Nurse Specialist at CancerCare Manitoba. She has educated thousands of healthcare providers and cancer survivors about cancer, sexuality and survivorship. She is the editor of the Oncology Nursing Forum, an avid blogger for ASCO Connections, and the author of 13 books on the topics of illness, sexuality and cancer survivorship. (www.drannekatz.com)

QUESTION FROM PROSTATE CANCER SURVIVOR:

I am starting something called SBRT (I'm not 100% sure what that is!) later this month and I'm afraid to have sex with my girlfriend (we recently got together after I was widowed a year ago) in case I pass on the radiation to her. I have had difficulty finding any information about this.

RESPONSE FROM DR. ANNE KATZ:

SBRT stands for stereotactic body radiation therapy and it is a newer form of external beam radiation that takes place over a shorter period of time, for example five treatments in five weeks (one treatment each week). Higher doses of radiation are given at each treatment and this method has been tested in men with low- and intermediate-risk prostate cancer (Gleason 6 or 7). The treatment is highly effective; a recent study of over 2,000 men with low- and intermediate-risk prostate cancer showed 85 to 90% had no rise in PSA seven years after treatment with SBRT (Kishan et al., 2019).

Radiation kills cancer cells by damaging their DNA so that the cancer cells can no longer divide, and so they die. The cancer cells are then broken down by the body and removed. The cells do not die immediately; it takes days or weeks of treatment for the DNA to be damaged and this is why the side effects of radiation are felt for weeks or months after treatment is over.

There is no risk that you can "pass on" the radiation to your girlfriend. SBRT is just a new way of radiating the prostate and instructions for patients are essentially the same as for those who have "regular" external beam radiation. You are not "radioactive" and you cannot harm others during or after treatment.

Sexual side effects for men treated with SBRT are very similar to those men experience after "regular" external beam radiation, with about half of men experiencing erectile difficulties after five years. This is dependent on age and erectile function before treatment.

Kishan, A. et al. (2019) Long-term outcomes of stereotactic body radiotherapy for low-risk and intermediate-risk prostate cancer. *JAMA Network Open*, 2 (2), e188006. doi: 10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2018.8006.

Watch Dr. Katz' presentation on sexual health and intimacy from the Prostate Cancer Pathways for Patients and Caregivers event recorded at Englewood Health in Englewood, NJ on September 29, 2018.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A2ZdDHw2WGY&t=8542s>.

Read previous issues of *Between the Sheets* at www.ustoo.org/BTS.

Do you have a question about sexual health or intimacy? If so, we invite you to send it to Us TOO. We'll select questions to feature in future *Between the Sheets* columns.

Please email your question to: ustooBTS@ustoo.org

Or mail your letter to:
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