

Between the Sheets...

January 2021

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. Jeffrey Albaugh, Director of Sexual Health at NorthShore University HealthSystem and at Jesse Brown VA Medical Center in Chicago, IL. Dr. Albaugh is a funded researcher, a board certified advanced practice urology clinical nurse specialist, and a board certified sexuality counselor. In addition to his many publications in peer reviewed journals and chapters in books on sexual dysfunction, Dr. Albaugh published *Reclaiming Sex and Intimacy After Prostate Cancer Treatment*. He has been quoted in media and publications as an expert in the treatment of sexual dysfunction, and is a member of the Us TOO Board of Directors.

QUESTION FROM PROSTATE CANCER SURVIVOR:

Can you offer some pointers for success with using the vacuum device for sex?

RESPONSE FROM DR. JEFFREY ALBAUGH:

Thank you for your question. I am sure you are not the only man out there struggling with trying to master the vacuum device. I think the most important key to success is one-on-one training with a knowledgeable professional who really knows how the vacuum device works. Practice and patience are essential to mastering the vacuum device. It is important to keep the pubic hair trimmed neatly to get a good seal for the pump against your body. Some men use a body shield to cover the hair, but most men just trim the hair neatly with a beard or hair groomer. It is important to be in an upright position when working with the vacuum device, if possible, to promote blood flow into the penis. If you can get a partial erection, try and get your penis started with whatever erection response you can get. The more you start with, the easier the additional blood will flow into the entire penis to help you get an even erection.

Take your time with pumping and don't rush the process. Wait about 5 seconds after each 1-3 pumps to allow the blood to move all the way down to the tip of your penis between the pumping. If you are using a battery device, press 5 seconds then release 5 seconds and repeat that process. Every time it hurts, release the suction completely by pushing the release button and pulling the device away from your body, and then re-adjusting the penis inside as you re-establish suction. If you started with a fairly flaccid penis, or completely flaccid, it may take 30-40 releases and readjustments to get a painless, even, lifted-off erection inside the device. That is your only goal: a painless, even, lifted-off erection. Practice getting those painless, even, lifted-off erections every day until you perfect that process and before you even try the tension rings to hold the erection.

Once you have mastered getting 5-10 painless, even, lifted-off erections every day, you are ready to try the tension ring, and you will start with the loosest ring in your kit. A ring on your penis is strange, and it helps to start with the loosest ring using plenty of lubricant on your penis and under the ring on the device. If the ring is not tight enough, you can try the next smaller ring until you find the ring that holds the erection. It is important to use plenty of lubricant both on the penis and under the ring on your device. If you use the cone to load the ring on your device, you will use plenty of lubricant on the cone to pull the ring down across the cone onto the device and the lubricant will end up under the ring. Transferring the ring off of the device onto the base of your penis is also tricky and you need to be shown how to do that. Don't ever wear the tension ring for greater than 30 minutes maximum. Taking the ring off is another challenging thing and you need someone to show you how to do that as well. It helps to re-lubricate the penis before you start to take the ring off and then, if you have outer rings or tabs on the side of the tension ring, pull on both sides simultaneously to release the tension around your penis. The blood will begin to move out of your penis back into your body as you stretch the ring from around the penis. After the penis becomes flaccid you can carefully inch the ring off your penis (with plenty of lubricant you reapplied). Nothing replaces a one-on-one demonstration from a knowledgeable professional on how to use the vacuum device and the rings. Ask for the help you need, as no description can replace proper training from a qualified expert with the device.

You can access the new edition of my book or download a free copy of my original book at www.drjeffalbaugh.com.

Watch Dr. Albaugh's presentation on sexual health and intimacy from the *Prostate Cancer Pathways for Patients and Caregivers* event recorded at NorthShore University HealthSystem in Skokie, IL on November 3, 2018 at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hiq0dDEb1I0&t=4483s>.

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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