

Between the Sheets...

May 2019

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:

Should my partner wear a condom while he is on Zytiga?

RESPONSE FROM DR. ANNE KATZ:

Zytiga (abiraterone) is an anti-androgen (it blocks testosterone). The only caution related to sexual activity is that a man on this medication should use a condom if he is having sex with a pregnant woman or a woman who wants to become pregnant, as the medication can harm the fetus.

We do not know if the medication or breakdown products of the medication are found in the semen of men taking this medication. This means that we don't know if the sexual partner of a man taking abiraterone can be exposed to the medication during oral or penetrative sex. If you are concerned, then a condom should be used for all sexual activity where you may be exposed to the medication.

Remember that this is a testosterone blocker so, in theory, there should be no adverse effects on a female partner. A male partner may, however, experience some side effects, but this is not discussed in any of the material posted by the drug manufacturer.

QUESTION FROM PROSTATE CANCER SURVIVOR:

I had my prostate removed almost a year ago and am happy to say that I am cancer free! I am able to have the occasional erection but they are not reliable and, of course, this is making me frustrated. But what I did not realize is that I don't have orgasms – nothing comes out! They didn't tell me about this before the surgery!

RESPONSE FROM DR. ANNE KATZ:

First, I want to clear up any confusion about orgasms vs. ejaculation. These are two separate processes. However, for most men, they have always occurred together. So many men don't know there is a difference. Orgasms are the pleasurable sensations that men feel during intercourse, oral sex and/or masturbation; these are a spinal cord reflex. Ejaculation is the usually simultaneous emission of semen and needs both the prostate and seminal vesicles to occur. The surgery for prostate cancer removes both the prostate and seminal vesicles, resulting in no ejaculation. BUT you can still experience the sensations of orgasm without ejaculation. Some men report that their orgasms are more intense after the surgery than before. Of course, there are also men who report that their orgasms are less intense than before and this bothers them.

A lot of the sensation of orgasm comes from contraction of the muscles of the pelvic floor. So if you experience orgasms that are so intense that they are painful OR orgasms that are very weak, you should see a specialized pelvic floor physiotherapist who will assess those muscles and suggest exercises that may help to correct this.

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>

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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feature on sex and intimacy,
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