

## Between the Sheets...

November 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. 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:

*I was wondering if you could go over the changes that occur after nerve sparing prostate cancer surgery?*

### RESPONSE FROM DR. JEFFREY ALBAUGH:

*Thank you for your question and I would be happy to review that information with you. Erectile dysfunction is common after surgery, radiation or hormone androgen deprivation therapy. After surgery, in particular, the nerves for erections become inflamed and can take up to five years and an average of two years to recover. This can be a source of frustration. From a psychological standpoint, there are other issues that may come into play during sex after prostate cancer treatment. Some men may fear they won't be able to get an erection, or feel like a failure if they can't perform. Erectile dysfunction—even if temporary—can have a negative impact on some men's sense of manhood. Worry and stress only add to the problem. Some men may have fears about leaking urine during sex (this can happen sometimes, but it is harmless since urine is sterile anyway). Men and their partners may be fearful of pain or discomfort during lovemaking, which can be another distraction. It may take some experimentation to find what works best for both of you. Remember, sex is supposed to be fun, so explore and enjoy each other during this time of rediscovering new ways of pleasuring each other.*

*Some other changes may also occur. If your prostate was surgically removed, no ejaculate will come out of your body after surgery. That's because the prostate and seminal vesicles have been removed, and there's no longer a pathway for seminal fluid. You should still be able to have the orgasm/climax sensation and men report that it is still very enjoyable after surgery or radiation. Some men experience temporary penile shrinkage after surgery. Sometimes this can also occur with other treatments, such as radiation or hormone androgen deprivation therapy. Men often describe this to me as "their penis has disappeared into their body" sort of like a turtle's head disappears into their body.*

*It may help to approach sex after prostate cancer with the goals of connectedness with your partner and pleasure. You don't need an erection for either of those two things. If you are prepared for these changes, they will be less surprising. Knowledge is empowering for both you and your partner. No one knows definitely who will and will not experience continuing sexual issues. Putting pressure on yourself to perform sexually can make sex stressful and frustrating for both you and your partner. Keeping the lines of communication open (including discussing what's working and what isn't) is also important. If you don't experience the results you hoped for right away when you have sex after prostate cancer surgery, try not to be discouraged because it can take several years for recovery to occur. In the meantime, you and your partner can be sexual in many other ways and this can be very gratifying in terms of intimacy and sex. You can also explore erectile dysfunction treatments with your urology healthcare provider.*

*You can access the new edition of my book or download a free copy of my original book at [www.drjeffalbaugh.com](http://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=Hiq0dDEb1l0&t=4483s>.

**Read previous issues of *Between the Sheets* at [www.ustoo.org/BTS](http://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](mailto:ustooBTS@ustoo.org)**

**Or mail your letter to:**

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