

# HORMONE THERAPY FOR PROSTATE CANCER

Side Effects and Sexual Changes

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**Waterloo Wellington  
Regional Cancer Program**

Ontario Health (Cancer Care Ontario)

Treatment for your prostate cancer may include surgery, radiation therapy, and hormone therapy. You may have side effects (changes) from these treatments that affect your body, how you see yourself, and your relationship with others.

**If you have any side effects, or need to ask a question, talk to one of your health care team members:**

- **Doctor**
- **Nurse**
- **Radiation Therapist**
- **Social Worker**

## Hormone Therapy Side Effects

Hormones can cause prostate cancer cells to grow. Hormone therapy is when you take medication to reduce the amount of these hormones in your body or block their effects on cells.

**Common Side effects of hormone therapy are:**

- **Hot flashes** – all of a sudden you feel warm, your skin might turn red, and you may sweat.
- **Breast swelling** - your breasts may swell and feel tender.
- **Changes in weight, muscle and bones** - you may gain weight even as you lose muscle mass and bone strength. You are at a higher risk of bone loss.
- **Mood swings** – the way you react and respond to others may change all of a sudden. You may feel unsure of yourself and how you look which may cause you to feel more worried and depressed.
- **Lower sex drive** –you may not want to have sex.
- **Erectile Dysfunction (ED)** - your penis may not get hard (erect).

### Hot flashes

- Cool off with water, a fan and wear light or layered clothing.
- Avoid alcohol, caffeine, spicy food, and hot drinks as they may bring on a hot flash.
- Feeling upset or worried may make hot flashes worse.
- Talk to your doctor about medications that can help.

### Breast Swelling and Tenderness

- Wear loose shirts made of soft fabric.
- Apply a cold or warm compress.
- Take over the counter pain medication.

## Changes in Weight, Muscle, and Bones

- Work with your family doctor to track your health.
- Eat healthy
  - Eat whole grains, fruits, vegetables and low fat protein.
  - Limit fatty foods
  - Limit sugary snacks
  - Replace foods high in salt with low salt options.
- Stay active
  - Aim for 30 minutes of activity each day or a total of 150 minutes each week.
  - Do strength exercises to keep your bones strong.
- Talk to your healthcare team to see if you need a calcium and vitamin D supplement.

## Mood Swings

- Talk with your partner, family, or a close friend- sharing your feelings can help others get a sense of what you are going through.
- Ask your health care team to refer you to a social worker.
- Join a support group – talk to someone with prostate cancer who may also feel the same way.
- Do things that make you feel good about yourself.
- Eat healthy and stay active.
- Make the effort to stay close and sexually active with your partner – learn new ways to show you care.

## Sex Drive

Prostate cancer and its treatment often affects your sex drive, your erections (blood flow into penis making it hard) and your ability to produce children. You may have less desire for sex due to feelings about having cancer, or from the treatment itself. It may return in time.

## Orgasms (peak of sexual excitement)

You will still feel the pleasure of an orgasm, but little or no fluid is released.

## Erections

Damage to nerves and blood vessels from your cancer treatment may make it difficult for you to have an erection.

- **After Surgery** – your erections may be weak for the first few months. If the nerves near your prostate were not removed this may improve over the next two years.
- **After Radiation Therapy** – for many months your erections may not be as hard as they used to be.
- **After Hormone Therapy** – Unless you were on hormone therapy for many years your erections may return to normal after a few weeks or months.

## Treatment for Erection Problems

Talk to your doctor about what options are best for you. Types of treatment include:

### Medication taken by mouth

If you are able to have a partial erection this may be a good option. These work best after radiation therapy or if nerves were not removed during surgery.

### Medication used in the penis

You insert a pellet of medication in the opening of the penis, or inject a liquid in the base of the penis. Your erection should start in a few minutes, and last 30 to 60 minutes.

### Vacuum erection device

You will place your penis into a tube attached to a pump. The pump will act like a vacuum pulling blood into your penis to create an erection. Your penis is kept hard by placing a ring at its base.

### Penile implants

Surgery is needed to place a pair of tubes inside your penis. The tubes are then filled with fluid to create an erection.

## How to Cope

- Talk with your partner - be open and honest.
- Bring your partner with you to the doctor so you can both stay informed. Write down your questions before the visit.
- Plan to have sex when you are well-rested. Empty your bladder before sex and wear a condom if you are worried about leaking urine.
- Be willing to try new ways to show you care. Hugging, kissing, and holding hands can help you stay close without having sex.

If you would like more support ask your healthcare team to refer you to a social worker.

# Helpful Resources

## Social work services at WRHN Cancer Centre

Talk to your healthcare team about a referral to a social worker for more information and support.

**Sexuality and Cancer**, booklet from the Canadian Cancer Society

## Prostate Cancer Information

[www.cancer.ca](http://www.cancer.ca)

## Prostate Cancer Foundation of Canada

[www.prostatecanada.ca/about-prostate-cancer/living-with-prostate-cancer/sex-with-and-after-cancer](http://www.prostatecanada.ca/about-prostate-cancer/living-with-prostate-cancer/sex-with-and-after-cancer)

**Intimacy and Sex**, pamphlet from Cancer Care Ontario

[www.cancercareontario.ca/en/symptom-management/35051](http://www.cancercareontario.ca/en/symptom-management/35051)

## HopeSpring Cancer Support Centre

Online: [www.hopespring.ca](http://www.hopespring.ca)

Phone: 519-742-4673 or 1-888-680-4673

Use this resource for your information only. It does not replace medical advice from your doctor or other healthcare professionals.



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