

Chapter 15. Just for Partners of Men Diagnosed with Prostate Cancer

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This section is for the partners of men diagnosed with prostate cancer. We want to acknowledge that is very difficult to have your life taken over by a disease and all that it entails, including the decisions required, the treatment schedules, the side effects of the treatment, and the needs of a partner.

The best advice we have is communicate. Do not keep things inside or just “deal.” Let your partner know how you feel, find a support system or group and remember to take care of yourself, too. This will be a long process, and you will need support, and you will be an important source of support for your partner.

Prior to this diagnosis, your relationship may have been quite comfortable, and you may not have had a shake-up recently, but this potentially life-threatening event may present a challenge. You may need to re-establish your commitment to each other, spend more (or less) time together, and talk more than you have in a while. It will all be worth it; spend the time, offer more hugs, ask for more and talk.

Shock

Most couples recently told about a diagnosis of prostate cancer are in shock, scared and saddened. This is perfectly normal and will pass. Once the shock wears off, the decision-making begins, and then both members of the couple need support marching through the process. Encourage each other to talk with people, reach out to medical professionals, support systems, clergy and church, or other supportive communities.

Decision Making

Both members of the couple need to take an active role in learning about the disease and the decision making about treatment. The more you know, the better you will feel, and the more comforting you can be to friends and family.

We suggest you attend visits and help use this notebook. Keep track of questions you or your partner have between visits and help each other to remember to ask the doctors and nurses these questions when you see them.

You can encourage your partner to practice good self-care, including healthy eating, getting daily exercise, and sticking to a normal routine to ward off depression and apathy.

Who are You?

Your partner may react to this diagnosis in a way that surprises you. A normally competent and strong person may be very shook up, get depressed, angry, anxious, withdrawn, give up, or just tune out and want you to “take care of this.”

Don't! Your partner needs support and encouragement to take control and handle this (albeit while holding your hand). He needs to be in charge of this, so do not set everything up, find

support for him or make all of the appointments. Encourage him to talk about what is happening and participate.

Dreams for the Future

You may have just retired, raised your kids, or started to dream about traveling and building your dream house when this disease hit. Prostate cancer does not mean the end to those dreams; it just means that you need a plan, medical advice, and most importantly, the support of people around you, especially your family.

Not only is the impact of the disease important, but how it affects your ability to live each day and find joy is also important. Men seem to worry more about the immediate impact of the disease and treatment, whereas women are more concerned with the survival of their partner, so remember to discuss both and not focus only on today or the future.

Prostate Cancer and Sexuality: Lack of Libido

Many couples experience a lack of libido (desire for sexual activity) before, during and after treatment. Talk about this, be encouraging, and make sure your partner knows you are still sexually attracted and available. Things may be different, but you are in this together.

Erectile Dysfunction

All forms of treatment for prostate cancer have the risk of causing erectile dysfunction. It is important to remember that erections are only one part of a person's overall sexual response. Sexual arousal and intimacy can both occur without an erection.

You can talk with your partner about other ways to stimulate each other, what feels good and ways for both members of the couple to have orgasms without erections. Erections can usually be obtained with the aids described in Chapter 13.

Retreating and avoiding sex may only cause more stress and anxiety between partners, which is not what either partner needs right now. If you cannot work this through on your own, seek out a professional who can help.