

Start the conversation

Discussing sexual health with breast cancer patients



Visit LBBC's Sexual Health Toolkit

lbbc.org/sexualhealthtoolkit

Despite the impact that breast cancer treatment can have on sexual health, most young women report that they never discussed the topic during their care. Sexual health is not an easy subject to discuss with patients, but with sensitivity, you can help your patients find relief for a problem that can feel hopeless.

Ask permission to discuss sexual health.

Introduce the topic in a way that lets the patient know they are in control.

Make it routine. The more practiced and comfortable you are, the more comfortable your patients will be entering this conversation. You can also practice with colleagues as you work it into your practice.

Let your patients know that you're available if they have concerns, even if they're not comfortable discussing the topic at that moment.

Let patients know they are not alone.

Patients may not understand that it's common to have side effects related to sexual health. Simply letting them know that others have experienced these same problems, and that there are resources to help, can be a profound relief to many people.

Evaluate the level of intervention needed. Some patients may just need reassurance and direction to resources, but some may need more intensive care. Validated tools are available to guide conversations and direct the appropriate level of help needed.

- Models to guide provider communication: PLISSIT model, BETTER model

Have referrals ready. You don't have to become an expert to start the conversation. Have some resources ready and establish relationships with local specialists for patient referrals.

Remember to include sex therapists. Sex is so much more than the physical act, and therapists can be valuable assets for patients struggling with lack of desire, partner communications, body image, and other common issues.

- To find experts: The American Association of Sexuality Educators, Counselors and Therapists (AASECT)

Thank you to those who provided information and insights.

Heather Macdonald, MD, FACOG and Stephanie Buehler, MPW, PsyD, CST-S, IF in *Let's talk about sex and breast cancer: Navigating tough conversations with your patients*, hosted by LBBC on 8.3.2022.

The young women who shared their experiences in LBBC's video, *Young women's stories and tips for providers: Sexual health and breast cancer*.

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