



# Brain Tumour Australia Information

## © FACT SHEET 49

### Relationships & Sexuality

#### The Brain- Relationships & Sexuality

A diagnosis of a brain tumour can affect sexual function directly, or indirectly.

An alteration to physical appearance as a result of surgery/treatment may result in self-consciousness and negativity about body image which can lead to reduced sexual desire.

Medication can also impair sexual functioning (leading to loss of desire, reduced lubrication, and painful intercourse).

While surgery causes post operative fatigue and temporary physical weakness, chemotherapy and radiation can greatly impact and reduce your desire for sexual stimulation due to adverse effects on hormone production.

Treatment can also affect energy levels resulting in tiredness, nausea, bowel or tummy upsets/discomfort, all affecting sexual desire.

So too can the medication prescribed for brain-swelling, seizures, nausea, anxiety and depression.

The lobe location of the tumour also adds to the dilemma complicating the patient's ability to understand (or prepare for emotionally) the effects of treatment as it relates to a decrease in libido

While most treatment-associated dysfunction or lack of desire is temporary, being able to openly discuss difficulties and options for sexual intimacy with your partner and medical team is key to managing the extent of disruption, treatment options, and your ability to resume normal sexual relations after treatment.

#### Birth Control

It's important to discuss potential effects of your treatment with treatment team if you take birth control pills.

Chemotherapy may halt menstrual periods temporarily, but precaution against pregnancy must be maintained due to the devastating effects of chemo to an unborn fetus. Some chemotherapy medications, as well as, anti-seizure drugs can interact with the effectiveness of birth control pills,

Chemo drugs can be transferred through sperm, and in some

cases, can be harmful to sperm thus damaging to a fetus. Condoms should always be used during both intercourse and oral sex to eliminate the possibility of exposing another to the harmful effects of chemotherapy drugs, either vaginally or orally.

As sperm can live for a period of up to three months, it's important to continue with condom safeguards during this time.

***Always discuss your method of birth control with your doctor***

#### Guidelines

- Communicate with your partner. Discuss your concerns about physical problems and feelings
- Be understanding of each others needs and feelings
- Work to find solutions that suit both parties
- Work at maintaining intimacy
- Recognise the importance of touch
- Be assertive about what works and what does not.
- Tell your partner what you prefer
- Be willing to try alternatives. Use lubricants, different positions, experiment with different ways of pleasuring each other, ie. massage
- Don't believe social myths about sex. Myths add further pressure (ie. People should not talk about sex; older people don't feel sexual; only intercourse is sex; intimacy has to lead to sex )
- Ask health professionals for advice. Don't be afraid to seek information about sexual functioning. Ask what you can and can't do.
- Ask for suggestions/instructions
- Work at feeling good about yourself.
- Focus on your attractive features. Wear items that make you feel comfortable
- Gradually confront body changes to seek self-acceptance (eg. Scars, hair loss) It may take time to adjust
- Take time

**If problems persist, seek professional advice**