



CANCERcare®

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fact sheet

DATING AND NEW RELATIONSHIPS: DURING AND AFTER CANCER

A cancer diagnosis can often impact how you view dating and romantic relationships. Often, it can be difficult to adjust to the emotional and physical challenges that accompany a diagnosis. It is important to remember that it's normal to feel nervous about dating during or after cancer treatment. Here are a few helpful tips to use as a guide.



DATING

Be comfortable with yourself first.

Regardless of whether you are currently receiving treatment or have entered the post-treatment phase, coping with your diagnosis may take time. Adjusting to treatment side effects or the physical and emotional impact of a cancer diagnosis is a personal experience. Remember that each experience is unique and there is no right or wrong time to begin dating. However, it is important to feel comfortable and confident, regardless of where you are in your cancer experience.

Decide when it's the right time for you to start dating and keep in mind that your health is a top priority.

Managing doctor appointments or coping with treatment side effects can be time-consuming and stressful. You may want to consider talking to your family, friends or even your health care team to help you decide when dating might be right for you.

Start slow, start small. It's normal to feel nervous or anxious about dating. Consider getting involved in group social events, taking a local class or joining a club. Starting small with

these types of activities can help build confidence, self-esteem and social skills. Remember to take it slow; these can be opportunities to socialize, relax with friends and meet new groups of people without stepping outside of your comfort zone.

Get support. Support groups offer the chance to meet and interact with people going through a similar experience. While friends and family can be a good source of support, a group can provide guidance, perspective and a unique judgment-free environment. Also take into consideration that many support groups are facilitated by a licensed professional; this can add to the overall group experience.

Stay positive. Keep in mind that dating is not always easy (even without a cancer diagnosis). If you are having trouble navigating the complex issues that often arise with cancer and dating, it may be helpful to reach out to a licensed oncology social worker. CancerCare's licensed oncology social workers can help anyone affected by cancer, free of charge. To speak with a licensed oncology social worker, call 800-813-HOPE (4673).

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TALKING ABOUT YOUR DIAGNOSIS

Plan when to have the talk. Wait until you are ready; sharing your diagnosis is a personal experience. Consider writing down what you would like to say or even practicing with a friend. It can be helpful to have some answers prepared in case they ask questions regarding treatment side effects or the possibility of recurrence.

Be honest. Being upfront about your feelings and about your cancer diagnosis can encourage the person you are dating to be honest about his or her feelings as well. Communication, honesty and trust will become increasingly significant as your relationship grows.

INTIMACY

Talking about intimacy or the physical closeness in a new relationship is important. Cancer often impacts your body physically which may cause you to be self-conscious about certain things. Communicating about intimacy with your partner can help strengthen the relationship, increasing emotional trust. These conversations can be uncomfortable so you may want to feel prepared. Deciding what you want to say ahead of time and writing it down can help guide the conversation. It is okay not to feel “ready”; be open with your partner and have an honest conversation about what is right for you.



CancerCare® Can Help

Founded in 1944, CancerCare is the leading national organization providing free support services and information to help people manage the emotional, practical and financial challenges of cancer. Our comprehensive services include counseling and support groups over the phone, online and in-person, educational workshops, publications and financial and co-payment assistance. All CancerCare services are provided by professional oncology social workers and world-leading cancer experts.

To learn more, visit www.cancercares.org or call **800-813-HOPE (4673)**.

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