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**Detroit Free Press**

## **Cancer Doesn't Have to Mean the End of Intimacy**

By Patty Brisben

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Over the past 25 years, October's Breast Cancer Awareness Month has become one of the most visible campaigns in the nation, with a wealth of pink gracing the pages of magazines, lining store shelves and dashing across finish lines. While finding a cure is still a ways away, progress is undeniable in terms of public consciousness, with more women than ever conducting self-exams and taking the time to educate themselves about cancer symptoms and prevention.

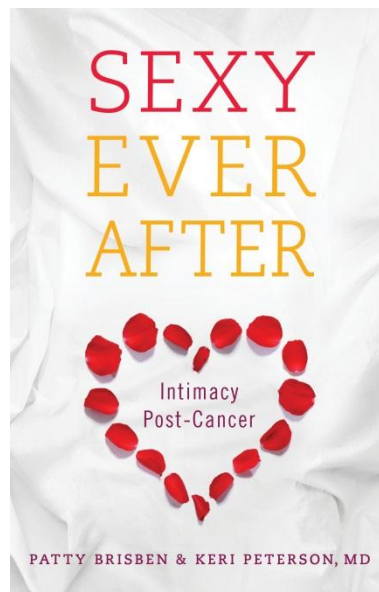
Despite this progress, there is still at least one topic that seems to be overlooked, yet it affects millions of men and women every year -- sex after cancer. According to a study published in *CA: A Cancer Journal for Clinicians*, a large percentage of men and women (including 95% of women with breast cancer) experience some level of sexual dysfunction after being treated for cancer.

Why is this?

Hormonal therapy and chemotherapy can cause low libido, and there is a huge psychological component.

"Your sense of sexual identity may have been compromised, or your body image damaged, due to treatment symptoms like hair loss, [infertility](#) or disfigurement," says Ian Kerner, a sexuality counselor and best-selling author, "but that doesn't mean you can't use those changes as an opportunity to find new ways to enjoy sex even more."

In a new e-book "Sexy Ever After: Intimacy Post-Cancer" (Good in Bed Guides, \$5.95), authors Patty Brisben and Dr. Keri Peterson say, "Your sexuality is a vital part of your health and sense of well-being. To put it under the carpet because you've been sick is shutting off an area of your life that is a source of vitality."



Below are a few suggestions from the book to enable couples to take back control of their bedroom activities:

- Create intimate rituals: Create moments that you can look forward to every day, rituals that make you feel closer and lovey-dovey. Perhaps you could share a cup of coffee each morning. Give each other foot massages while watching TV in the evening. Hold hands while taking your daily walk. Anything that helps you feel that you're much more than two ships passing in the night.
- Have more nonsexual physical contact: Cancer treatments can leave you feeling sexless or just plain ugly. Engage in some nonsexual touching such as gazing into each other's eyes and

passionate hugging. Intense eye contact leads to greater intimacy, and something as simple as hugging can help with your connection. Even a 30-second hug can raise oxytocin levels in women and increase feelings of attraction.

- Chase those rushing endorphins: You know those arousal-enabling, rushing endorphins you feel during sex? Think outside the box and throw yourself into new experiences that get the blood flowing, the heart pounding and the adrenaline pumping. Perhaps you've always dreamed of trying out sky diving, or you've thought about going for a ride on a hot air balloon. Both fantastic options! After you've put your lives in each other's hands and lived to tell the tale, you'll probably want to celebrate your continued existence with a high-octane romp in the bedroom.

To learn more about intimacy post-cancer or to read more helpful tips, download your own copy of "Sexy Ever After" (free to download during October at [www.pureromance.com](http://www.pureromance.com)), speak with your doctor and speak with your partner.

Life post-cancer should be about more than just surviving; it needs to be about living and taking advantage of each day. Starting this important dialogue is a key element in the process.