



Coping with Prostate Cancer



Canadian
Cancer
Society



CANADIAN CANCER SOCIETY

We're here for you.

When you have questions about treatment, diagnosis, care or services, we will help you find answers.

Call us at [1-888-939-3333](tel:1-888-939-3333).

Ask a trained cancer information specialist your questions about cancer. Call us or email info@cis.cancer.ca.

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Find your local community services in an easy-to-use, searchable database of cancer-related programs and services across Canada. Visit csl.cancer.ca.

Our services are free and confidential. Many are available in other languages through interpreters.

Please note: the information presented in this resource is not meant to replace any medical advice provided by your healthcare team. For medical advice please consult with your healthcare provider.

Section 1: Managing Treatment Side Effects

Most treatments for prostate cancer can cause both short-term and long-term side effects. This section will outline what to expect with the most common side effects, and how they may be managed or treated.

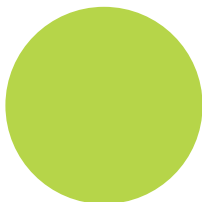
> Urinary side effects

Incontinence is the loss of the ability to control urination. Any treatment that removes the prostate or destroys prostate tissue can affect urination. This is because the prostate is close to the bladder and it surrounds the urethra (the tube that allows urine to flow outside the body).

Urinary incontinence is a relatively common side effect of radical prostatectomy. It is usually temporary, lasting a few weeks to a few months, but in a small number of men, incontinence may be permanent. Leakage of urine may occur without warning, or only with heavy lifting or sudden physical movement such as sneezing or laughing. Other urinary difficulties may occur with radiation therapy including: frequent urination, burning and pain, blood in the urine or an intense urge to urinate.

MANAGEMENT OF URINARY SIDE EFFECTS

There are many strategies that can be used to help manage urinary side effects after prostate cancer treatment, including the following:



Lifestyle Changes: Some urinary symptoms can be relieved if you drink fewer liquids – especially before bed, avoid caffeine and alcohol and if you lose weight.

Kegel (Pelvic Floor) Exercises: Kegel exercises work by strengthening the pelvic floor muscles surrounding the urethra. These are the muscles that help you control urination. Making these muscles stronger can lessen incontinence.

Medication: Some medications such as anticholinergic drugs (e.g., oxybutynin), can reduce bladder irritability and decrease bladder spasms. This, in turn, may relieve urinary urgency and frequency and some forms of incontinence.

Some men have trouble urinating because of a blockage in the urethra. These individuals usually have a very full bladder at all times, which may result in “overflow incontinence” – where the bladder can no longer hold any additional urine. These men may benefit from medications that improve bladder emptying.

Surgery: If lifestyle changes and medication do not improve urinary side effects, surgery may help. There are several different surgical options:

- Eliminating blockage in the urethra – Sometimes scar tissue can build up in the urethra and cause it to narrow, restricting urine flow and making it difficult to empty the bladder fully. This can be repaired by cutting into the scar tissue or by stretching the urethra.
- Urethral sling procedure – A surgically implanted sling compresses the urethra below the sphincter (the muscles used to control the flow of urine from the bladder).
- Artificial urinary sphincter implant – A cuff is placed around the urethra to compress it. The cuff is inflated or deflated with a mechanical valve.
- Bulking agents – Substances such as collagen can be injected into the bladder neck to reduce urinary leakage, although this is not very effective in men.

> **Bowel side effects**

Radiation therapy to the prostate may affect the wall of the rectum and it can cause bowel inflammation, urgency to go to the toilet, diarrhea, cramps, blood in the stool and fecal incontinence (loss of regular control of the bowels). This is normally temporary but may be permanent in rare cases. New imaging techniques and more precise methods of delivering radiation have reduced the risk of these complications.

Radical prostatectomy surgery has a very small risk of injury to the rectum. A temporary colostomy (an opening in the abdomen for bowel movements to come through into a bag) may be necessary. This is usually short-term until the rectal injury site is healed.

Some medications such as hormone therapy may cause nausea, diarrhea and general gastrointestinal upset.

MANAGEMENT OF BOWEL SIDE EFFECTS

Management of bowel side effects may include dietary modifications, medication, bowel training, local remedies such as steroid suppositories, and in rare cases, surgery.



> **Hormone Therapy side effects**

Hormone therapy can cause many side effects including hot flashes, fatigue, weight gain, loss of muscle or bone mass, erection difficulties, loss of libido (sex drive) and lower blood counts.

MANAGEMENT OF HORMONE THERAPY SIDE EFFECTS

Hot Flashes: These can be controlled with medications or by making some dietary and lifestyle changes.

Fatigue and Weight Gain: Exercise and healthy eating may reduce fatigue and weight gain.

Loss of Muscle or Bone Mass: Men using hormone therapy are at particular risk of muscle loss and mineral loss in the bones that can make them fragile and vulnerable to fractures—a condition called osteoporosis. This can be slowed or even prevented through regular exercise and healthy eating.

> **Sexual side effects**

Whether you're single or in a relationship, changes in how you perceive yourself, your family role, and patterns of sexual intimacy often occur during and after prostate cancer treatment. Sexual side effects of prostate cancer treatment may include infertility, decreased libido (sex drive) and erectile dysfunction. Having open and honest communication and getting timely medical and counselling assistance are essential when it comes to managing these changes.

MANAGEMENT OF SEXUAL SIDE EFFECTS

Infertility: The inability to father children can be a side-effect for men who get surgery or radiation therapy to treat the prostate cancer. Surgery for prostate cancer causes infertility as the sources of semen fluid (i.e., prostate gland and seminal vesicles) are removed which causes "dry orgasms". Infertility is also common after radiation therapy as the semen produced may not properly transport sperm. If you wish to father children after prostate cancer treatment you should consider having your semen (containing sperm) frozen.



Section 1: Managing Treatment Side Effects

Decreased Libido (Sex Drive): A lowered interest in sex is a common mental and physical side effect of prostate cancer treatment, particularly hormone therapy. Men with prostate cancer should not be given testosterone for a decreased libido because this feeds the growth of cancerous cells. Talking things over with your partner or visiting a counsellor or sex therapist may be helpful.

Erectile Dysfunction (ED): Erectile dysfunction is the inability to achieve or maintain an erection adequate for sexual intercourse. Varying degrees of ED are common following radical prostatectomy, even when the surgeon spares the nerve bundles that control erections. Most men treated with nerve sparing surgery experience an improvement in their erections over time. Some, however, never recover the ability to get a spontaneous erection. Men who have radiation therapy also develop erectile difficulties, but these usually occur more gradually over time.

Open and honest communication is essential.



TREATMENT OF ERECTILE DYSFUNCTION

There are several treatments available to help treat ED. Discuss the options with your doctor.

Medical Treatment for Erectile Dysfunction	
Treatment	Advantages
PDE5 Inhibitors (Cialis, Levitra, Staxyn, Viagra)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Success rate for full intercourse 40–60%• Minimally invasive (easy to take)• Maintain spontaneity
Penile Injections	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Success rates up to 85%• Can work even if erection nerves removed/damaged• Useful if can't take PDE5 inhibitors
Medicated Urethral System for Erection	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 57% success rate• No needle• Can work even if erection nerves removed/damaged• Useful if can't take PDE5 inhibitors
Vacuum Constructive Devices	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Success rates 85–92%• Do not require medication or surgery
Penile Prosthesis	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 85% satisfaction rates reported• One-time surgery• Avoids risk of curved penis caused by penile injections• More relaxed foreplay with no change in skin sensation

Disadvantages

- May not work
 - Cost
 - Can't be taken with nitrate medications
 - Won't work if erection nerves removed
- Penis discomfort
 - May not work
 - Cost
 - Risk of prolonged, inappropriate erection
 - Scar tissue in 10–15%, which can curve penis
 - Fainting (rare)
- Penis discomfort
 - May not work
 - Cost
- Cost
 - Can cause bruising
 - Can't be left on longer than 30 minutes
 - Can't use with blood thinners
 - Penis may be cool to the touch so not a natural feel
- Infection in approximately 2% of men, requiring removal of the prosthesis
 - 15% of implants fail, and surgery is required to repair/remove prosthesis; may be embarrassing with new partner

Section 2: Follow-up Care

Treatment for prostate cancer is often successful in removing cancer cells and tumours. This is comforting but many men may still feel stressed because they worry about the cancer returning and how to get back into their daily routines.

> Follow-up Care

Once you complete treatment you will still need to be monitored closely by your doctor. It's natural to worry about the cancer coming back and to feel anxious about follow-up tests, but it's important to continue your regular appointments.

Your healthcare team should give you a follow-up plan that might include regular appointments and possibly additional exams, lab or imaging tests. It's important to report any new symptoms, such as bone pain or problems with urination, to your healthcare team. This may increase the chances of your healthcare team finding the cancer early if it comes back.



Section 3: *Physical and Mental Wellness*

A serious health scare, such as prostate cancer, makes many men focus on their health in ways they didn't before. Physical activity, healthy eating and mental wellness are important ways to maintain and improve your health during and after treatment.

> **Physical Activity**

It's common to notice a decline in fitness level and muscle strength during and after treatment. Becoming active again or introducing a fitness routine is an important step to regaining your health.

Regular physical activity has been shown to:

- Reduce fatigue and improve energy levels
- Improve cardiovascular health
- Reduce anxiety and depression
- Help in maintaining a healthy weight
- Improve muscle strength

Talk with your doctor or healthcare team to get their advice on an exercise plan before starting.





> **Healthy Eating**

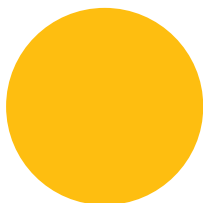
The side effects from prostate cancer treatment can make it difficult to eat well. Treatment can make you nauseous, affect your sense of taste, reduce your interest in eating food, or cause you to gain weight that is hard to lose.

Most of these side effects will get better with time. Many people find eating smaller portions every two to three hours helps them feel better. It may also be helpful to seek the advice of a dietician who can tailor a meal plan to your needs.

Making a few simple changes, like increasing the variety of healthy foods in your diet, can have long-lasting benefits. Limiting alcohol and maintaining a healthy weight and diet may also lower your risk for secondary cancers and improve your overall health.

> **Emotional and Mental Wellness**

A prostate cancer diagnosis can change your life. Stress, anxiety, fear and many other emotions are common. Having a strong support network is important to ensure you get through this difficult time in a positive way. Keep in mind that your support network can include friends, support groups, church and spiritual groups and your healthcare team (e.g., family doctor, oncologist, social worker, psychologist, sex therapist).



*Regular physical activity
can reduce fatigue and
improve energy levels*



Here are a few ways to maintain mental and emotional wellness during your cancer journey:

- Be honest and clear with the people who you identify as wanting support from
- Share only the information you're comfortable sharing. If you're not comfortable sharing something about your diagnosis or treatment then don't
- Make a list of how each person can help you during this time (for example, drive you to appointments, help with chores, listening when you need someone to talk to)

Having a strong support network is important to ensure you get through this difficult time in a positive way.





- Ask your support network for the assistance you need, remembering that your needs may change as you move through your cancer experience
- Use relaxation techniques frequently such as deep breathing and meditation
- Take a break from everyday routine and make time for things you enjoy
- Join a support group. It sometimes helps talking to others who have gone through or are currently dealing with a similar experience
- Reach out to your healthcare team if you are finding it hard to cope with how you are feeling.



ABOUT THE CANADIAN CANCER SOCIETY

The Canadian Cancer Society is the only national charity that supports Canadians with all cancers in communities across the country.

For more information, contact the
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A Answering Your Questions
on Prostate Cancer

B Basics of Treatment
for Prostate Cancer

C Coping with Prostate Cancer



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