



FACT SHEET

Sexuality after a Brain Tumour

Why think about sex?

Going through a brain tumour, people's first response may be "thinking about sex may seem like the last thing to worry about". However, for many people it remains an important part of their lives, a source of pleasure, of reassurance and intimacy. It can help people to hold onto a sense of confidence and feeling good about themselves.

How can a tumour affect my sexuality?

The brain has been described as 'the ultimate sexual organ: the seat of sexual urges, thoughts, sensations, inhibitions and behaviours'.

A person becomes sexually aroused because regions of the brain involved in sexual function send messages along the spinal cord to the nerves which control the genital organs.

Therefore, a tumour that causes temporary or permanent damage to the brain may affect areas of the brain that play a role in our sexual drive or sexual responses.

Loss of interest in sex: A person appears to have no sexual drive or sexual interest.

Loss of arousal: Men may find they have difficulties attaining or keeping an erection. Women may find they have lower levels of vaginal lubrication.

Ejaculatory difficulties: Men may find they ejaculate too quickly, or on the other hand, find that they have problems ejaculating at all.

Orgasmic difficulties: Women may find problems having an orgasm.

How can a tumour affect my sexuality? - Secondary effects

Apart from the injury to the brain, other factors associated with having a brain tumour can also affect sexuality. These include:

- (i) stress, depression and/or anxiety,
- (ii) medication,
- (iii) chronic pain,
- (iv) relationship difficulties, and
- (v) loss of confidence.

Some people feel less attractive which then affects sexual desire and functioning.

What can I do about this?

- Speak to your social worker, doctor, nurse or cancer support worker.
- The NSW Cancer Council also has a useful information booklet about sexuality and cancer.
- Speak to a sexual health counsellor. These counsellors can be found at your local Community Sexual Health centre (look up in the phone book), through the Australian Psychological Society (www.psyhology.org.au), or through the Australian Society for Sex Educators, Researchers and Therapists (www.assertnsw.au or phone 02 9280 0151).