



# Breast Cancer, Body Image & Sexuality

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# What is Body Image



- Body image is the picture of our own body we form in our mind.
- Many women are pre-occupied and dissatisfied with their body.
- Negative body image is associated with depression, low self-esteem & poorer sexual and relationship adjustment.

# Image and Appearances Are Not Equal

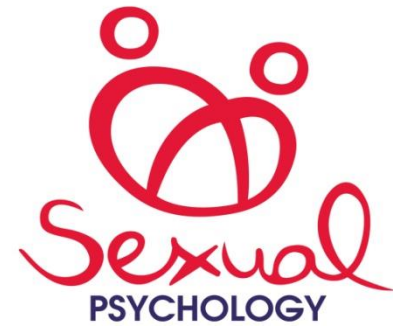


- Negative body image is a problem with the *image*, not actual appearance.
- What a person actually looks like has little to do with their body image and self-esteem.
- Breast cancer and Rx changes women's bodies and decreases their acceptance of their body and worsens body image.

Breast Cancer and Treatment	Changes to body and sexuality which can lead to poor body image	Relationship factors that exacerbate poor body image
Fear of mortality & recurrence	Treatment prioritised over concerns about appearance: feel shallow/ungrateful for mentioning body image concerns.	Carer patient dynamic: Stop sexualising partner. She feel unattractive.
Chemo Rx	Lymphedema, Hair loss, Weight gain, Skin dryness: dissatisfaction with appearance, spectating. Fatigue, Irritability, Depression: Exacerbates negative perception of body.	Partner needs time to adapt May be interpreted as rejection. Sensitivity to partner comments.
Radiotherapy	Burns: embarrassment about body Infertility or pregnancy related problems: less feminine, less of a woman, guilty, damaged goods.	Pressure to freeze embryo's and make decisions about children. Rejection. Stay in unhappy relationship.
Hormone suppression	Sudden onset/premature menopause vaginal dryness, painful sex, poor arousal, orgasm: low desire, loss of sexual confidence.	SE cause conflict or Partner sexual dysfunction: exacerbates concern about attractiveness.
Surgery	Loss of breast(s), erogenous zones, breast sensation: poor arousal, unsexy, undesirable Sexual avoidance, avoid looking in mirror.	Don't know where to touch Avoid touching/sex to not upset her. Undesirable.

*“As We Think, So We Become”*

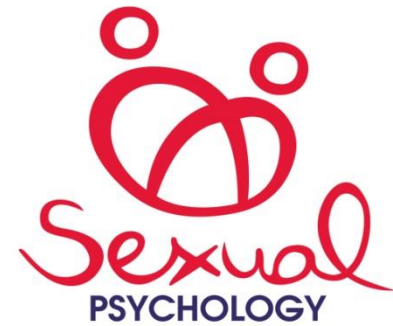
Buddha



- Negative body image biases processing of information.
- Increased focus on the negative
  - Mirror/ photo/video checking: scrutinizing the scar, cellulite or hair loss.
  - Touching the disliked area.
  - Weighing self repeatedly
  - Excessive grooming, disguising
  - Overvaluing how much flaw should mean to self-esteem

*“As We Think, So We Become”*

Buddha



- Filter out all the positive or neutral information.
  - Stop looking at the good parts
  - Dismiss compliments from partner “he’s just saying that to be nice”
  - Sensitivity to criticism
- Self judgment
  - “My arms look gross”
  - Comparison with others, magazine, “I should look like.....”

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Buddha



- Projection of beliefs onto others
  - He thinks I’m gross
  - He’s interested in other women, jealousy
  - People are staring at me
- Results in short-cut thinking to self-rejection & rejection by others every time you become aware of body image
  - I’m ugly, I’m unlovable
  - No one will want me, S/He will leave me

*“As We Think, So We Become”*

Buddha



- Thoughts create feelings
  - Negative thoughts lead to negative emotions & V.V.
  - Low self-worth and depressed mood
  - Anxiety about the future
  - Frustration & anger that you can't change the situation may change to hopelessness and helplessness
- Avoidance of negative feelings
  - Avoid socialising, sex, relationships, things we love
  - Comfort eating
  - Rejecting partners to protect self from anticipated rejection



# Thinking Strategies to Improve Body Image



- Stop labeling “I’m fat, not good enough”
- Practice self-acceptance: if you don’t accept self no-one else will
- Notice double standards: You judge yourself more harshly than others
- Broaden self focus: take note of valuable aspects of self
- Reduce importance of perceived flaw to self-esteem
- Reduce expectations/ high standards about appearance
- Test beliefs: e.g. everyone is staring at me
- Accept compliments, write them down

# Behavioural Strategies to Improve Body Image



- Throw out your scales
- Stop buying women's magazines they are evil
- Compare yourself favorably with peers
- Limit internet searches
- Stop scrutinizing in the mirror; stand back, limit time, broaden focus
- Notice when touching perceived flaw if also judging
- Stop seeking reassurance from partners about attractiveness; provide it for self
- Limit time grooming & disguising

# Behavioural Strategies to Improve Body Image



- Exercise & or mind body therapy; Yoga
- Slow breathing
- Mindful reflection, meditation
- Pleasant events
- Socialising
- Invest in a good wig
- Buy new clothes
- Breast reconstruction, prosthesis
- Take time for self: reading, window shopping,
- Spoil your body, massage, scrubs, moisturizing

# Negative body Image Impact on Sex



- Reluctance to initiate sex, low desire
- Embarrassment at being nude
- Self-consciousness about making new sexual requests
- Result in ridged sex, mechanical sex
- Sexual withholding for fear of rejection,
- Stay in an unhealthy relationship or not address relationship problems due to fear of rejection
- Spectatoring

# Strategies to Reduce Body Focus During Sex



- Practice self-acceptance of body.
- Stop scrutinizing body during sex, redirect attention outward. Mindful sex.
- Wear a top which makes you feel sexy
- Get an electrician to put a dimmer on your bedroom light; scarf over lamp.
- Get a lock for your bedroom door (kids).
- Gradual exposure to nudity.

# Exercise



- Write down a goal for reducing a body image inhibition.
  - a) I want to stop being distracted by my thighs during sex.
  - b) I want my partner to touch my breast without me getting angry
- Break it up into achievable steps.

# Strategies to Increase Arousal



- Invest in the creation on a new sexual script.
- Take responsibility for improving your sex life; make suggestions for what you want.
- Be willing to say you don't know what you want and experiment.
- Use Sex toys: lube, vibrators, stories, internet.
- Get prescription from GP for vaginal oestrogen, PDE5-Inhibitors (Viagra, Cialis, Levitra)

# Strategies to Increase Arousal



- Don't compare current sex with *best sex*
- Expect it will be more difficult to orgasm, need more time
- Foreplay is more important, coming from a low base
- Partner can be more annoying, its probably not them but low arousal
- Stop blame: breast cancer is hard on you both
- Say no to painful sex. Shallow penetration, outercourse
- Don't have sex out of guilt and obligation



# Strategies to Improve Desire for Sex



- Don't wait for desire to return spontaneously, nurture it
- Simmering: spend time looking forward sex rather than dreading it
- Plan when to initiate, don't put off till tomorrow.
- Increase transitioning: What ever you need, bath, get dressed up, time to self, read erotica, porn
- Go to bed early, don't leave it to the last thing in the day.

# Strategies to Improve Desire for Sex



- Notice your turn off's and reduce them
- Notice your turn on's and make sure you get them
- Touching is valued for itself: not all touching must result in intercourse
- Expand sensual touching to outside the bedroom.

# Involve Your Partner



- Sexual problems cause embarrassment, shame, frustration, anger, disappointment, feelings of failure & lower self-worth for you both
- Its hard to talk about
- Every long-term relationship has its ups and downs, this is your challenge
- Sex can't stay the same throughout a relationship, do what works now.

# Soft No



- When your partner initiate sex it's a compliment and often a way to show love.
- Don't make initiation to turn into a point of conflict or pattern of avoidance
- Soft no encourages respect and closeness
  - Not that way
  - Not at this time.... Make a time and stick to it

# Negotiation: Sexual Hierarchy



Choice, rather than obligation enhances desire

The options include:

- 1) No participation: No sex or masturbating away from partner
- 2) Minimal participation: Masturbating besides the other, usually in bed.
- 3) Low participation: Masturbation with partner assistance.
- 4) Outercourse options: any non-intercourse sexual activity of your desire.
- 5) The works including Intercourse.

# Exercise



- Break up into groups and tell the others what you struggle with body image
- Share stories about what has helped you feel better about your body generally
- Share stories about what has helped you feel better about your body sexually
- This can be pre-cancer or post cancer
- Write a plan of how you might incorporate this new knowledge into your thinking and behaviour

# Exercise



Get together in a group and make suggestions of how you might achieve this

- a) If I start looking at my thighs I will redirect my attention to something I like, like my partners bicep or the feeling of his touch
- b) I will start to be more open with my body around him, baby steps shower with door open, get changed in front of him, wear sheer t-shirt to bed, wear singlet whilst having sex, take top off

# Exercise



- c) This might involve systematic desensitisation:
- Looking at your breast non-sexually
  - Looking at your breast with sensual play
  - Touching your breast non-sexually
  - Touching your breast sensual play
  - Touching your breast during erotic play