

Relationships, intimacy and sex post-cancer and post-surgery



Sex and intimacy can be difficult for many women after a breast cancer diagnosis. Furthermore, talking to a prospective new partner about having had cancer and breast surgery, whether you're flat or have undergone reconstruction, can be emotionally complex. It requires vulnerability, but with the right approach, it can also deepen trust and intimacy. Here are some thoughtful ways to approach this conversation, along with meaningful advice and Australian-based resources.

Timing and Setting

Start by choosing the right time and setting. This isn't a conversation to have on a first date or in a rushed moment. Wait until a connection is forming and mutual trust is starting to build. Pick a quiet, private place where you feel safe and calm. You don't need to share everything at once, offer what feels right and allow the conversation to unfold naturally.

Use Honest, Empowering Language

How you speak about your experience can influence how it's received. Frame your story with honesty and strength. You might say, "There's something important about my past I'd like to share with you," or "I've gone through breast cancer treatment, which included surgery, and it's part of who I am today."

Whether you're flat or have chosen reconstruction, it can be helpful to explain your decision in your own words. There's no "right" choice, only the one that suited your body, your recovery, and your personal values. You could say, "I chose to go flat because it felt right for me," or "I had reconstruction to help me feel more like myself again." Keeping it matter of fact can help normalise the experience for your partner too.

Anticipate and Accept Reactions

People may respond in a variety of ways, from curiosity, to supportiveness, to awkwardness. Remember, their reaction isn't a reflection of your worth. You might encounter discomfort, but that doesn't mean rejection. Give them space to ask respectful questions, and don't be afraid to gently correct misconceptions.

Partners may be confused or unsure of the best way to show support and affection. They may retreat or wait for cues from you about when to resume an intimate or sexual relationship.

If they're not accepting or supportive, it's painful. But it's also a useful way of identifying who is truly compatible with you.



Address Intimacy and Body Image Gently

For many people, body image after cancer is complicated. You may feel your body has betrayed you. And, after months of treatment, you may feel detached or disconnected from the pleasure your body once gave you.

It's okay to acknowledge if you're feeling nervous or unsure. You could say, "I'm still adjusting to how my body looks and feels," or "I want us to take things slowly." Being open can ease anxiety for both you and your partner. It may also help them feel more at ease in supporting you.

Sometimes, people worry about saying or doing the wrong thing. Let your partner know it's okay not to have all the answers—and that what matters most is kindness and willingness to learn.

Discussing each person's fears and hopes and comforting each other can help you and your partner have a satisfying sexual relationship.

Australian Resources and Support

In addition to the [Inherited Cancers Australia support services](#), the following Australian organisations might also help to navigate these conversations:

- **Breast Cancer Network Australia (BCNA)** – www.bcna.org.au: Offers a wealth of information on breast cancer, including body image, intimacy, and partner communication.
- **Cancer Council Australia** – www.cancer.org.au: Provides support services, including counselling and peer support groups.
- **Reclaim Your Curves** – www.reclaimyourcurves.org.au: A supportive community for women considering or recovering from breast reconstruction.
- **So Brave** – www.sobrave.com.au: Focuses on young breast cancer survivors and includes advocacy and body confidence campaigns.

Speaking about your experience with cancer is not a test to pass, it's a powerful act of self-respect. The right partner will see your honesty as strength and meet you with empathy.

If you're uncomfortable or unsure about how to have these conversations, a health care provider trained in sexual health concerns can offer support.