

# This Body is Mine: Reclaiming Body Image & Intimacy

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- Moving Beyond Cancer to Wellness – June 3, 2023
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# Choose a Superhero

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- What is their name?
- What is their Superpower?
- What is their “fatal flaw”?
- Do you admire them?
- Would you want to live with them?



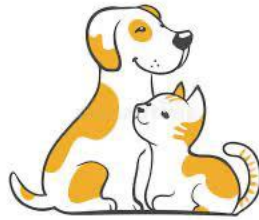
# Choose a real-life hero for you

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- What is their name?
- What makes them a hero to you?
- What is a physical “flaw” or challenge?
- What is a character “flaw”?
- Do you admire them?
- Would you want to live with them?

# Choose a current support in your life



- What is their name?
- How do they support you?
- What is their supportive Superpower?
- Do they have physical or character “flaws”?
- Do you like them anyway?

# What is Body Image?

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- A person's picture or mental image of themselves.
  - Oxford dictionary
- Including physical characteristics (**body perception**) and one's attitude toward those characteristics (**body concept**).
  - American Psychological Association
- A combination of thoughts and feelings about your body.
  - National Eating Disorders Collaboration (NEDC.com)





# What is Self-Esteem?

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- Confidence in one's own worth or abilities.
  - Oxford Dictionary
- How you value and respect yourself as a person.
  - heretohelp.bc.ca



# Why are body image and self-esteem important?

- **Any change** can be hard to accept and can affect your body image and self-esteem
- Even if you don't have any physical changes that can be seen, you still might feel that others "see you differently" than they did before.
- You might think that others don't understand you or can't relate to you now.



- Altered body image can lead to:
  - decreased self-care & unhealthy lifestyle choices
  - relationship challenges – partners, family, friends, healthcare team, public...
  - Loss of intimacy, isolation
- Low self-esteem can lead to:
  - anxiety, stress, fear, worry, depression, isolation, anger
  - a sense of futility, giving up



# How Cancer Messes With Body Image and Self-esteem

- Physical Changes

- More obvious

- Hair loss
    - Weight gain or loss
    - Muscle tone and fitness
    - Loss or change of a body part
    - Scars, rashes, skin color or tone
    - Movement – ability, assistance

- Less obvious

- Ostomy
    - Prosthesis
    - Devices
    - Fertility



- Emotional Changes

- Anxiety, worry, guilt
  - Sadness, loss, grief
  - Frustration, **‘I’m not in control’**
    - Fatigue, abilities, appointments
  - Fear of the unknowns
  - Role changes – how we see ourselves as important or worthy
    - **‘I don’t know who I am now’**
    - Work, school, life goals
    - Usual role at home or in public
    - Activities, hobbies
    - Relationship changes



# What is Intimacy?

- Close familiarity or friendship
  - Oxford Dictionary
- Closeness, connected, cozy
- Supportive, equal footing, trust

## Types:

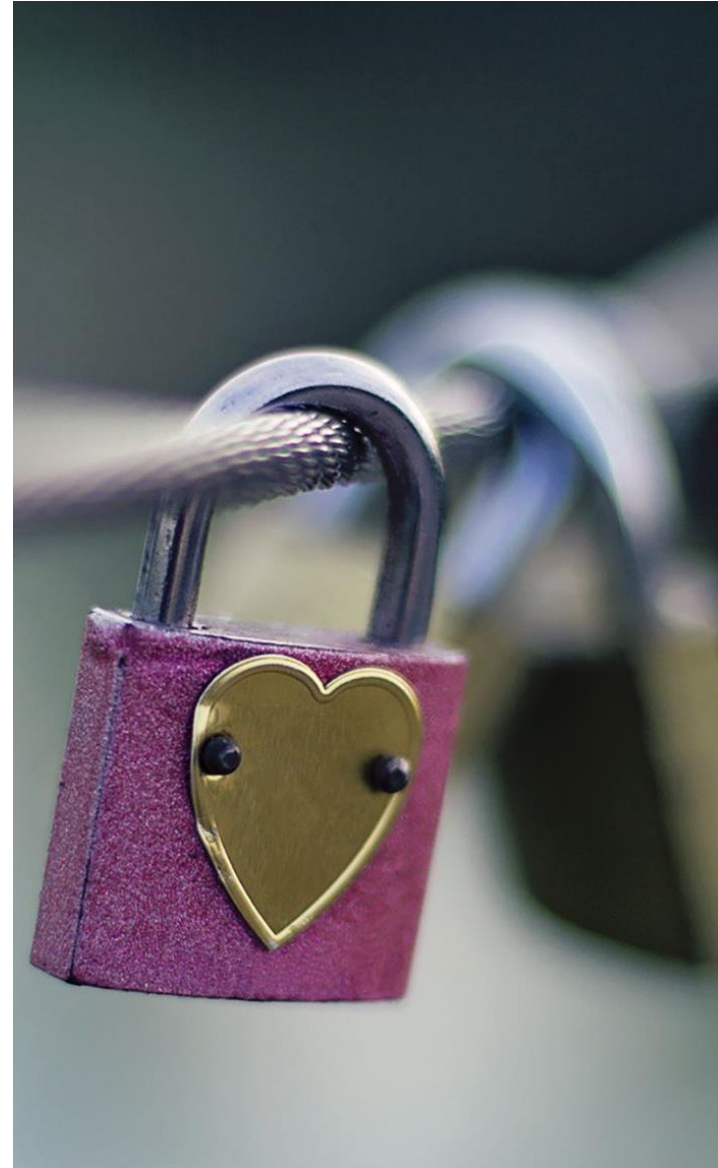
- Emotional – transparent, available
- Physical – safe touch, respect
- Mental – mutual respect, curiosity
- Spiritual – shared values or beliefs
  - PsycCentral.com



# Intimacy & Sexuality After Cancer

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- Worries about attractiveness
- Changes in desire to be touched
- Changes in the sensation of touch
- Changes in energy level and sex drive
- Hormone changes
- Worries about sexual function
- Worries about fertility

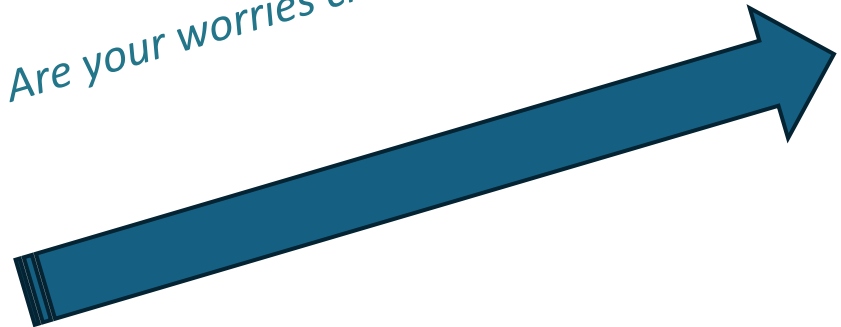


# When to seek help...

<https://cancer.ca/en/living-with-cancer/coping-with-changes/your-emotions-and-cancer/coping-with-body-image-and-self-esteem>

- You don't want to leave your house because you don't want people to see you.
- You don't want to date or meet new people.
- You avoid touching, being affectionate or having sex with your partner.
- You're afraid to undress in front of your partner.
- You won't let your partner see your scars.
- You're embarrassed because you lost or gained weight.
- You feel ashamed for having cancer.
- You're unable to accept yourself for who you are now.

*Are your worries creating worries?*



# Negative feelings are normal: Cordelia Galgut, PhD

<https://www.cancer.net/blog/2021-11/do-cancer-survivors-have-be-positive-all-time-letting-yourself-feel-every-emotion-during-cancer>

- *People have told me that hearing that negative feelings are normal has freed them up to be less guilt-ridden.*
- *Instead of saying, “I’m really struggling, but I shouldn’t be,” now I more easily let myself off the hook and say, “I’m suffering enough, and I don’t have to feel guilty for doing so or put pressure on myself to feel positive when I don’t.”*
- *And though I am quite against the instruction I have often been given to “move on” and “get over” cancer, it is certainly the case that in my own life, once I have been able to give myself permission to feel less guilty and less positive, I have more easily experienced a kind of release.*
- Allow yourself to feel angry
  - Recognize and acknowledge all the feelings
  - Ask for help if anger is *all* you feel all the time
- Adopt a mantra
  - What can you say to yourself that acknowledges your feelings and helps you move on with your day?
- Tell people how their words (or actions) make you feel
  - Anticipate the questions and comments
  - Practice what to say that will have the outcome you want or hope to have happen
  - Write it down, *then decide what to do with it...*
- Take the pressure to feel positive and grateful off yourself
  - Gratitude and positivity aren’t the enemy, it is the pressure and expectation that create resentment

## Tina Turner quote:

At every moment, we always have a choice, even if it feels as if we don't.

Sometimes that choice may simply be to think a more positive thought.



# Taking control of your body image after cancer

<https://www.cancercenter.com/community/blog/2021/04/cancer-self-image>

- Be aware of self-talk
  - Would I say that to a friend?
  - Affirmations, mantras, memes
  - Post-It's, phone reminders, vision boards
- Understand your communication needs
  - Take notice of what doesn't 'sit well'
  - Ask *clearly* for what you need (or don't!)
    - *Pause before hitting 'send'*
    - *Don't drink and text*
    - *It's OK to say what you mean*
- Take good care of your body
  - Movement
  - Nutrition, hydration
  - Rest
  - Follow-up appointments
  - Routine health care
- Seek support from others
  - Friends, partner, neighbors, classes
  - Supportive group/social activities
  - Take notice of isolation
  - Healthcare providers, mental health counselors or groups



# What to try: Tips for Positive Change

- Try positive new *sensory* experiences
  - *Eyes* – coloring, painting, art, people watching, being in nature
  - *Ears* – music, mindfulness, audio books
  - *Nose* – aroma therapy, gardening, sitting in nature with closed eyes
  - *Taste* – teas, cooking, smoothies, cuisines
  - *Whole body* – bath, massage, movement
- Intimacy – feeling socially connected
  - Connect with yourself
  - Reach out to a friend
  - Safe connections on-line
  - Work on *clear* communication
- Intimacy – feeling sexually connected
  - self-exploration of what feels safe, positive, and joyful
  - Partner time: use *clear* communication, rebuild trust, go slow
  - *Let each time be its own time*

**Talk to your healthcare team.**

**Support and resources are available for physical and emotional concerns!**

# Think about yourself...

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- What is your name?
- What is one “Superpower” you have?
- What is **one** flaw?
- What are **two positives** about you in this moment?
- Write **one positive affirmation or reminder**





## Sebene Selassie

You belong. Everywhere.

Yes, you – with all your history, anxiety, pain.

Yes, everywhere – in every culture, community,  
circumstance.

You belong in this body.

You belong in this very moment.

You belong in this breath...

and this one.

You have always belonged.

# Thank you for coming today!

Leslie Heron

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A flower  
does not have to  
do anything  
to be of service.  
It only has to be a flower.  
That is enough.  
A human being,  
a true human being,  
is enough  
to make the whole world  
rejoice.

Thich Nhat Hanh





# Resources

- Books
  - Al Achkar, M - Being Authentic, A Memoir & Roads to Meaning and Resilience with Cancer: Forty stories of coping, finding meaning and building resilience while living with incurable lung cancer.
  - Barrett, C - Good Grief: Strategies for building resilience and supporting transformation.
  - Brach, T - Radical Compassion: Learning to love yourself and your world with the practice of RAIN.
  - Hanh, T – The Art of Communicating
  - Huber, C – Making a Change for Good: A guide to compassionate self-discipline
  - Katz, A - Man, Cancer, Sex & Woman, Cancer, Sex.
  - Notte, J - The Monster Under the Bed: Sex, depression, and the conversations we aren't having.
- On-Line *(in addition to the ones noted on the slides)*
  - American Cancer Society: <https://www.cancer.org/>
  - American Society of Clinical Oncology: <https://www.cancer.net/>
  - CancerCare: <https://www.cancercare.org/>
  - Cancer Support Community: <https://www.cancersupportcommunity.org/>
  - Healing Circles Global: <https://healingcirclesglobal.org/>
  - National Coalition for Cancer Survivorship: <https://canceradvocacy.org/>
  - National Institute of Health/National Cancer Institute: <https://www.cancer.gov/about-cancer/coping/self-image>
  - Psychology Today “Find a Therapist” tool: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us>