

# Sexual intimacy and breast cancer survivors: New research

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An Indiana University study found that young, female breast cancer survivors often suffer from sexual and intimate relationship issues and are interested in using sexual enhancement products to treat these problems.

The study, "Young Female Breast Cancer Survivors: Their sexual function and interest in sexual enhancement products and services," was published Nov. 4 in the journal *Cancer Nursing*.

The study was funded by The Patty Brisben Foundation, a non-profit organization dedicated to furthering research related to women's sexual health.

The study found that a significant number of women reported vaginal dryness, genital pain, premature menopause, fatigue and fertility problems. In addition, survivors experienced significant problems related to sexual arousal, desire and orgasm.

"Although previous work has documented the sexual difficulties faced by young breast cancer survivors, strikingly little work has addressed strategies women might take to address these sexual problems," said Debby Herbenick, lead researcher and associate director of the Center for Sexual Health Promotion at IU Bloomington's School of Health, Physical Education and Recreation.

Herbenick adds that more than 2 million breast cancer survivors are

living in the United States, according to the National Cancer Institute.

"Given advances in early detection and treatment, more women survive breast cancer, which requires researchers to focus on important relationship and quality of life issues for survivors," said Jessica Johnston, executive director of The Patty Brisben Foundation.

Most of the women surveyed reported interest in using personal lubricants and massage lotions/oils to help treat these issues. Half of the women surveyed were interested in using vibrators or dildos and more than one-third were interested in sex games.

The women in the study also indicated comfort in purchasing sexual enhancement products through in-home parties held in someone's own home or during one's regular breast cancer support group meeting, and to a lesser extent from adult Web sites and adult bookstores or novelty stores. Researchers conclude that these venues might be possible places for nurses, doctors and support group leaders to refer their clients.

"Documenting the sexual problems experienced by survivors is important, but we also need to understand the broad and diverse ways that women want to address these sexual problems so that they can experience their intimate lives in ways that feel comfortable, pleasurable and that enhance their relationships," said Herbenick. "Many women expressed interest in these products, which makes sense given that so many had experienced genital pain, vaginal dryness, low desire or lack of orgasm."

Source: Indiana University

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