

# Phobic anxiety is linked to sexuality issues in women who are breast cancer survivors

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A study carried out by a research team made up of researchers from the University of Cordoba, the Maimonides Institute of Biomedical Research (in Spanish abbreviated to IMIBIC) and Queen Sofia University Hospital revealed that sexual dysfunction suffered by women who are breast cancer survivors is linked to phobic anxiety, which does

not affect sexual function in women with no history of cancer.

For [women](#) who have survived [breast cancer](#), this type of anxiety can make [sexual intercourse](#) an [unpleasant experience](#). These women have difficulty with excitement, lubrication, orgasms and with experiencing intercourse as satisfying or pleasant.

Though there are other factors that affect [sexual dysfunction](#) in women who have undergone [cancer](#) treatment, this recently published study in the journal *Psycho-Oncology* points out that psychological impact can be enough to cause a problem in a woman's sexual behavior and that women can lose desire for intercourse and try to avoid sex.

University of Cordoba researcher Ana Abril Requena says, "Phobic anxiety is consistently linked to sexual changes in this group of patients, which proves the significance of psychosocial factors upon sexuality, causing sexual relations to be unpleasant experiences in these cases." Though it is true that certain kinds of cancer affect sexuality more than others, such as those affecting reproductive organs, this research reveals that, in the case of breast cancer, [phobic anxiety](#) is the main cause of a lack of sexual drive. In this group of patients, less sexual activity and less interest in sex was observed, as well as a worse self-perception of attractiveness and femininity.

Abril points out that the discoveries made in the research "can be used to help prevent these kinds of issues and to develop more specific responses to help reduce the symptoms that negatively affect the quality of life for patients and their partners by means of, for instance, behavioral therapy and relaxation techniques."

Additionally, most female [breast cancer survivors](#) "are not satisfied with the quantity nor quality of the information provided to them by healthcare providers regarding breast cancer's side effects on their

sexuality after being diagnosed and above all after receiving treatment." The research shows that 79.3 percent of the women studied held this opinion.

This research project was carried out by means of questionnaires administered to two groups of women: one was made up of women who had been diagnosed with cancer and had finished treatment; the other was made up of women with no cancer history. Each group consisted of 30 people with an average age of 55. Most of the participants were married, and there was a similar educational level in the two groups. Within the group of patients, most had undergone chemotherapy (76.7 percent) and/or radiation therapy (73.3 percent), followed by hormone therapy (60 percent; 23.3 percent) and breast-conserving surgery (50 percent).

This method allows for measuring different dimensions of anxiety with standardized questionnaires such as the Inventory of Situations and Responses of Anxiety (abbreviated to ISRA-B in Spanish) and the Female Sexual Function Index (FSFI). The former obtains information on the three systems of anxiety (cognitive, physiological and motor) and on four specific characteristics of anxiety (in assessment, interpersonal, phobic and daily life situations). The latter, FSFI, assesses six different domains: desire, excitement, lubrication, orgasms, satisfaction and pain.

**More information:** Ana Abril-Requena et al, Sexual dysfunction and phobic anxiety in breast cancer survivors, *Psycho-Oncology* (2018). [DOI: 10.1002/pon.4894](https://doi.org/10.1002/pon.4894)

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