

# Sexual Health After Cancer

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# Ovarian Cancer and SEXUAL HEALTH

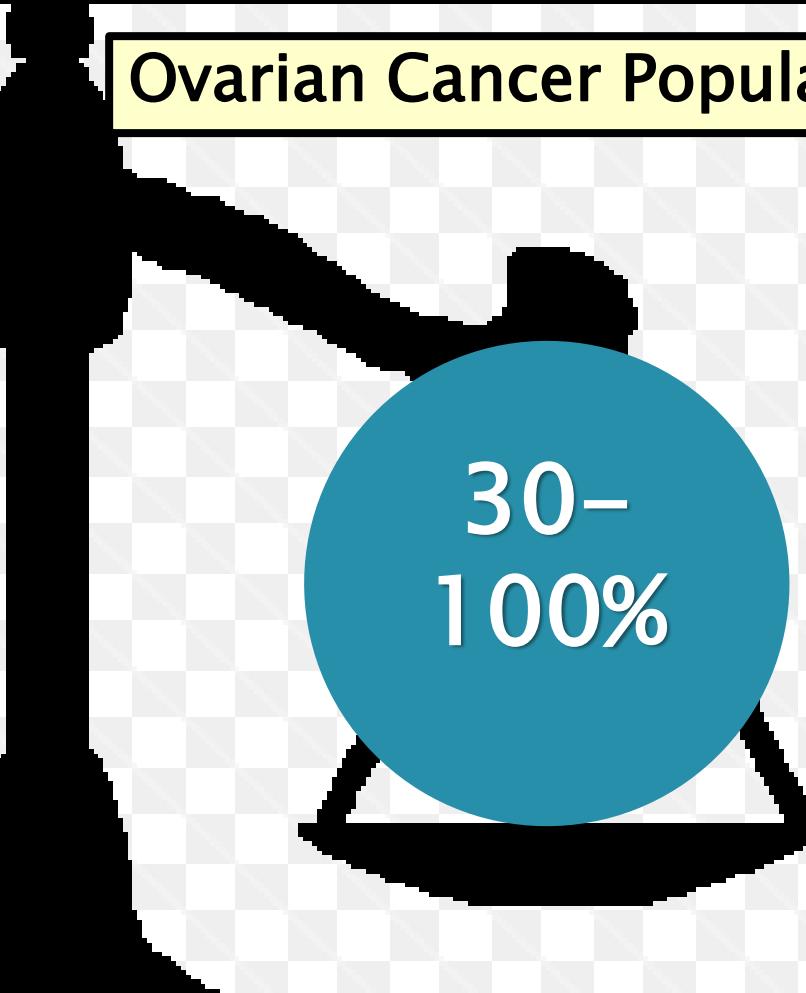


Amy Siston, Ph.D.  
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# Prevalence of Sexual Dysfunction

Non-Cancer Population

Ovarian Cancer Population



43%

30-  
100%

# Common Sexual Issues

## **DESIRE:**

25–59%

no/low sexual desire

## **AROUSAL:**

24–60%

difficulty with arousal/  
lubrication

## **ORGASM:**

27–38%

problems with orgasm

## **PAIN:**

29–40%

pain with intercourse

# Disorders of Desire

**“I’m not interested in sex”**

- ▶ Medical treatment effects
  - Abrupt and early menopause
  - Fatigue
  - Nausea
- ▶ Low sexual self image
  - Physical attractiveness
  - Self confidence for engaging in sexual activity
- ▶ Emotional Status
  - Antidepressant medication

# Disorders of Arousal

**“What’s going on down there?”**

- ▶ Medical treatment effects

- Vaginal dryness
- Vaginal irritation
- Vulvovaginal atrophy
- Insufficient lubrication



Painful sex

# Disorders of Orgasm

**“Why can’t I climax anymore?”**

- Medical treatment effects
- Antidepressant medication
- Fatigue
- Emotional components



# Sexual Pain Disorders

**“It hurts!”**

- ▶ Medical treatment effects
  - Scarring or shortening of the vagina
  - Vaginal dryness
  - Emotional component

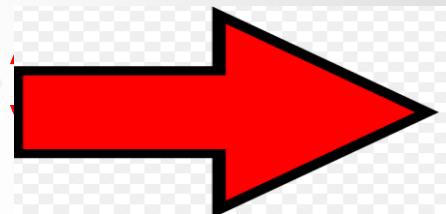


# Why is sex important in cancer care?



- Unlike other areas of function that improve with time post treatment, sexual problems get worse
- 30–50% become sexually inactive post treatment
- Sexual dysfunction post treatment is associated with poor quality of life and depressed mood
- Sex ranks consistently among the top 5 unmet needs of survivors

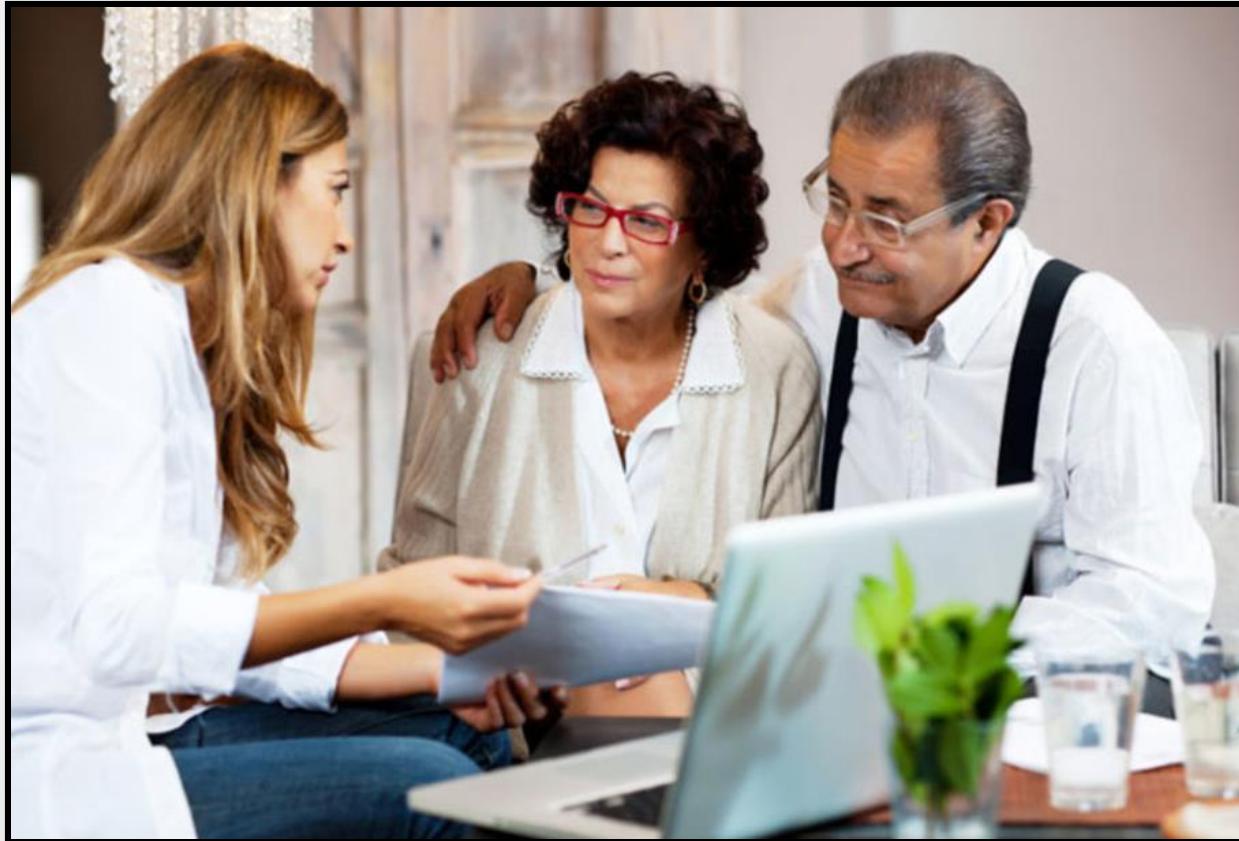
**What gets in the way**



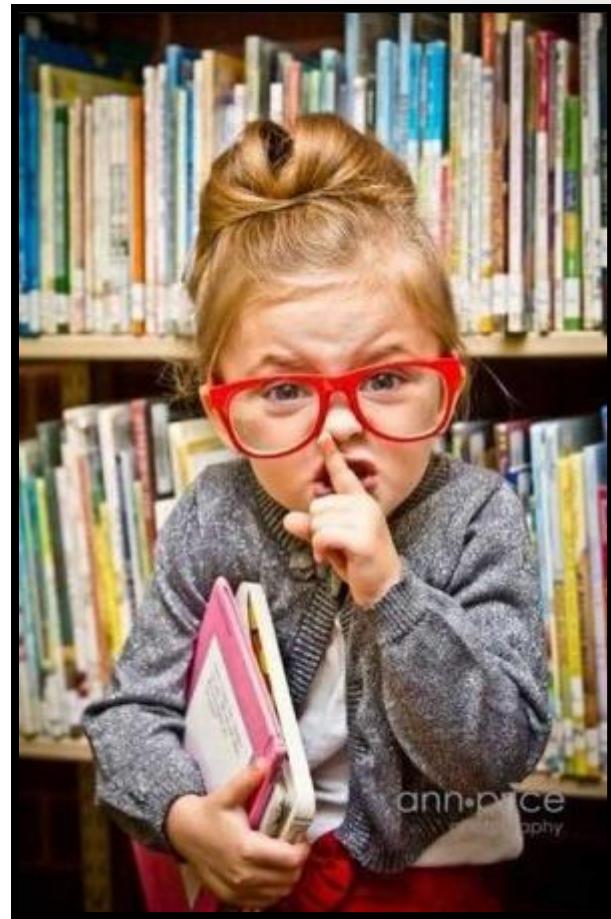
**Need to  
make quick  
decision...**



# Often more than one person is involved...



**DON'T  
ASK  
DON'T  
TELL**



*annprice  
photography*

# **Unrealistic “SEXPECTATIONS”**



# Psychological Distress:



## ➤ Illness provokes distracting worries

Am I healthy enough to engage in sex, to perform?

Will I hurt myself?

Is sexual activity unhealthy?

## ➤ Sexual encounters become a test

Will it work this time?

## ➤ Pain during sex is a distraction

Elicits fears about one's health

Benign or novel sensations during sex can set off chain reaction of anxious thoughts

# Psychological Distress:



## ➤ Depression > in cancer

- Decreased quality of life
- Fatigue
- Change in self esteem
- Medical treatment
- Antidepressants\*

## ➤ Depression ↔ Altered libido

# \*Antidepressants

- ▶ Wellbutrin (Bupropion)– less frequently associated with sexual dysfunction
- ▶ Paxil (Paroxetine)– more frequently association with sexual dysfunction
  - Inhibits sexual desire
  - Inhibits orgasm



# Other Contributing Factors

✓ Changes in body function/structure

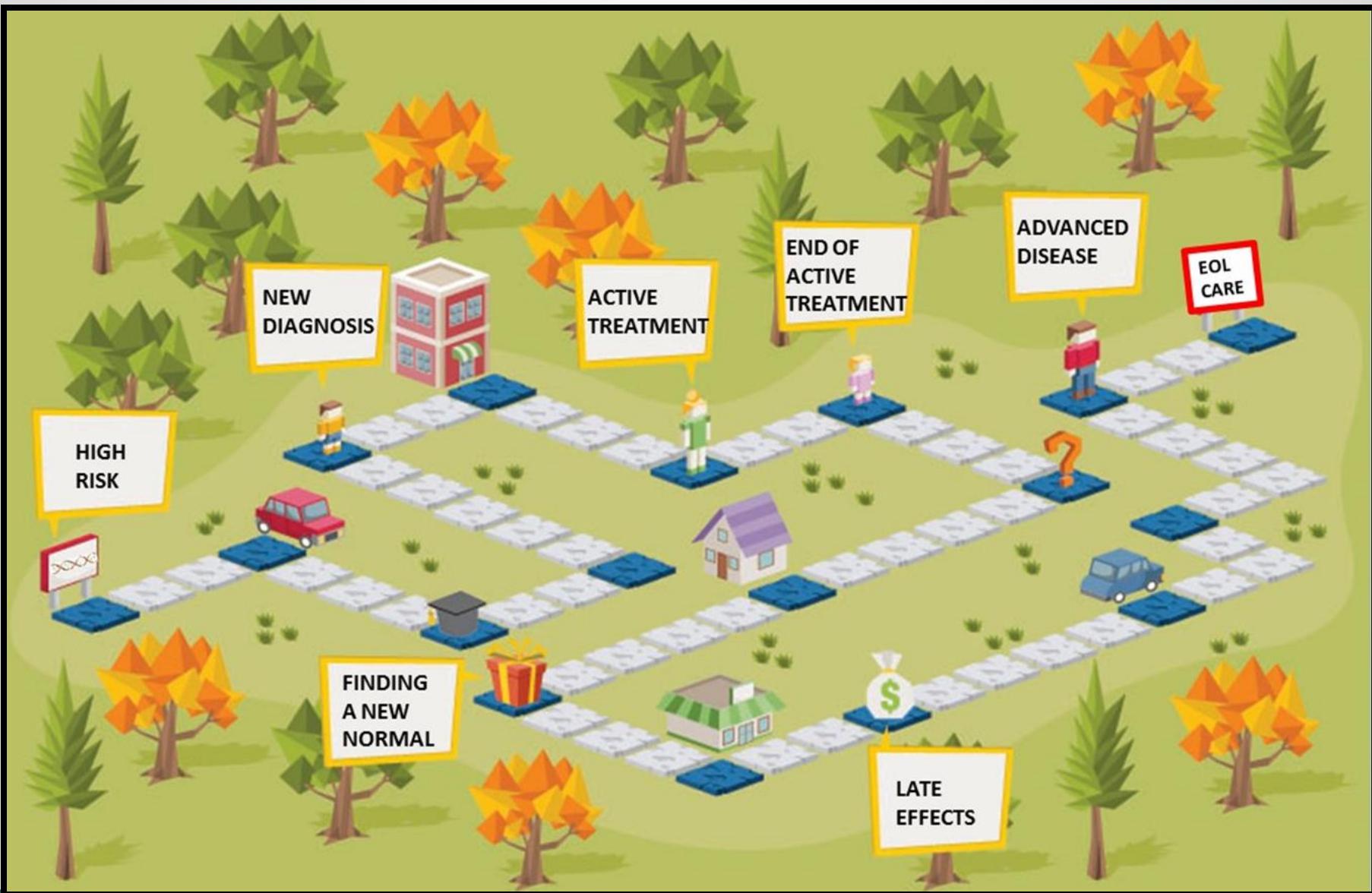
✓ Premature menopause

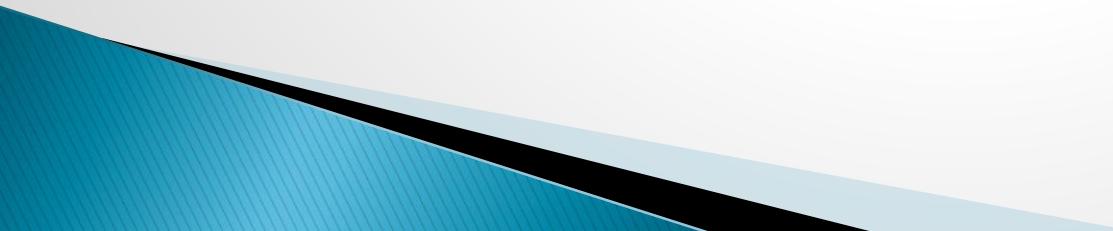
✓ Pain

✓ Changes in body image

✓ Decreased libido

✓ Fatigue





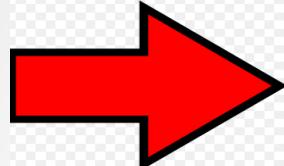


# Treatment of Sexual Problems



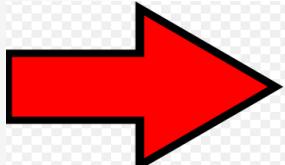
# Maintaining Sexual Health

S



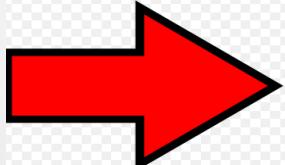
**STRETCH**

M



**MOISTURIZE**

L



**LUBRICATE**

# S STRETCH

- **Vaginal muscles can either tighten or become too lax with menopause or sexual inactivity**
- **Stretching helps to prevent pain**
- **Kegel exercises**
- **Vaginal dilators**



Diameter up to .6" (15mm)	Diameter up to .88" (22mm)	Diameter up to 1.04" (26mm)	Diameter up to 1.19" (30mm)	Diameter up to 1.35" (34mm)	Diameter up to 1.5" (38mm)
Length 3.48" (88mm)	Length 3.97" (101mm)	Length 4.46" (113mm)	Length 4.95" (126mm)	Length 5.45" (138mm)	Length 5.96" (151mm)

Universal  
handle fits  
all sizes

# M

# MOISTURIZE

- Used routinely, 2-3 times/week
- Helps moisturize the vaginal lining
- Makes vaginal and surrounding tissue more pliable/ strong
- Works for several days
- Compatible with condoms

## Types

- HyaloGyn
- Replens
- Moist Again



# L LUBRICATE

- Protects against irritation and dryness
- Short acting
- To be used immediately before intercourse

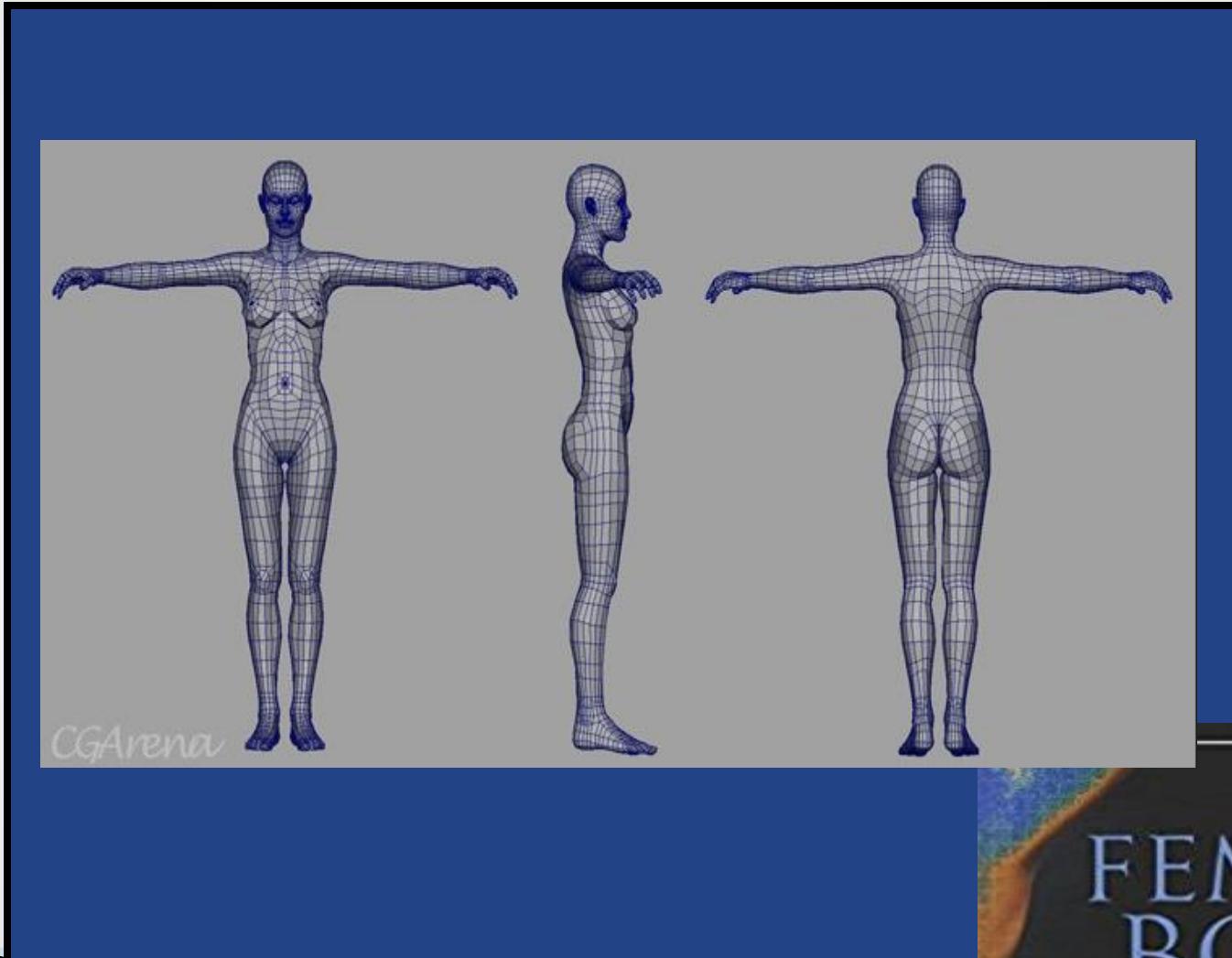
## Types

- Water-based:
- Silicone-based:
- Oil-based:

**Slippery Stuff  
Pink  
Olive, Coconut,  
Vitamin E & Vegetable Oils**

# Interventions for Sexual Problems

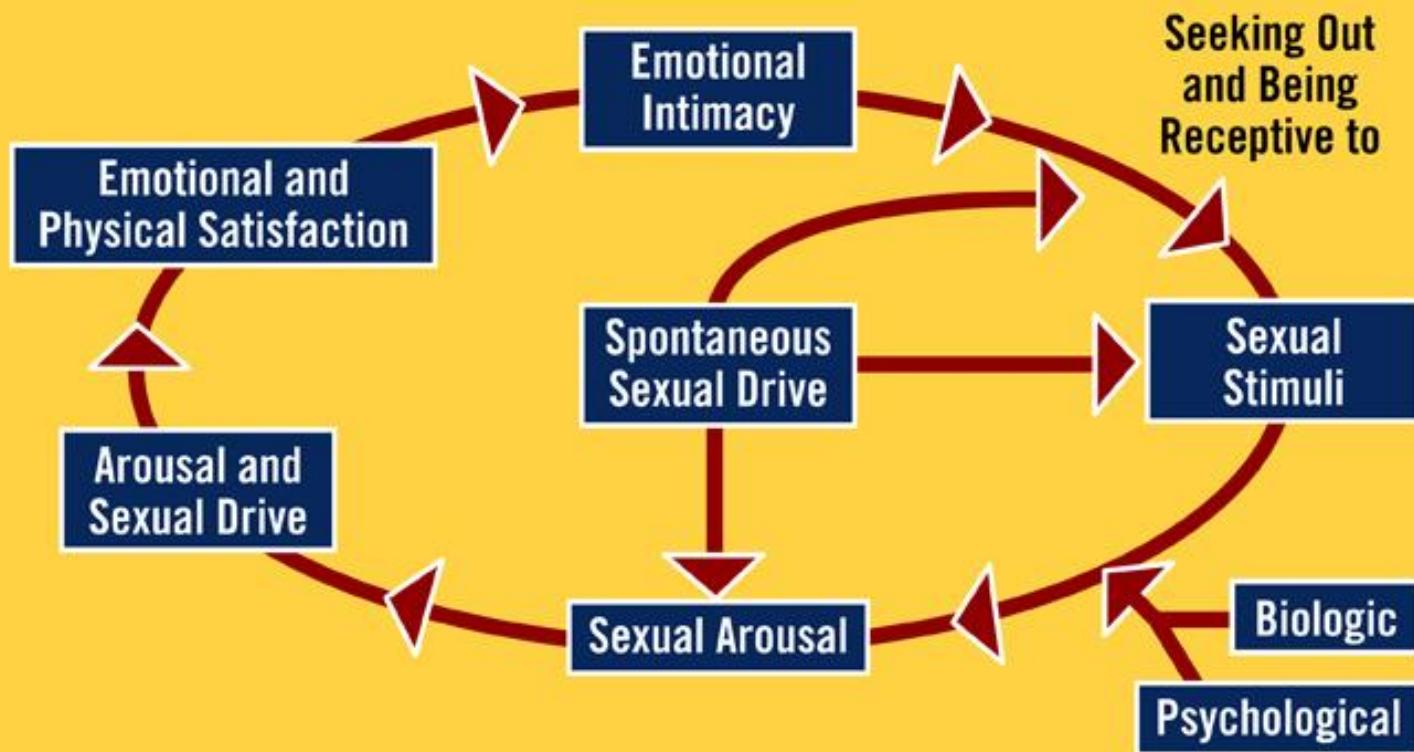
D  
E  
S  
I  
R  
E



THE  
FEMALE  
BODY  
**BLUEPRINT**

D  
E  
S  
I  
R  
E

## **Female Sexual Response Cycle**



Basson R. *Med Aspects Hum Sex.* 2001;41-42. Basson R. Human sex-response cycles. *J Sex Marital Therapy.* 2001;27:33-43. Adapted with permission.

Kingsberg SA, Knudson G.

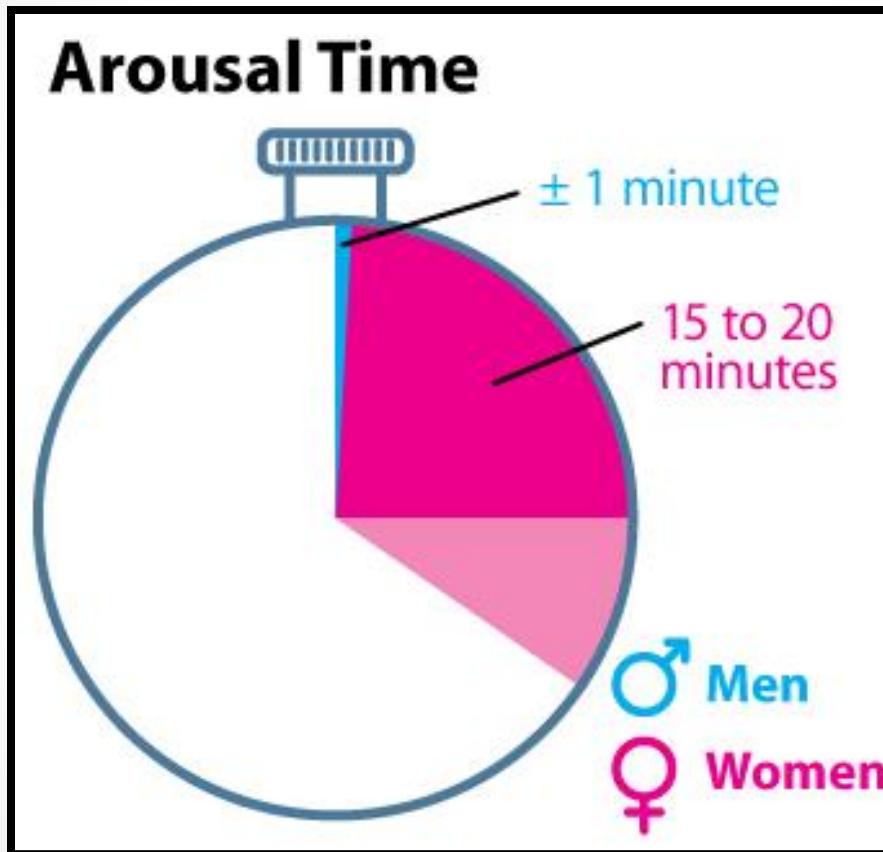
# A R O U S A L

Go down a water slide  
without water and  
you'll understand why  
foreplay is so important.



- Takes time to achieve satisfactory degree of stimulation before beginning intercourse

# AROUSAL



# A R O U S A L

- Use Lubricant
- Avoid intercourse
- EROS: increases blood flow to clitoris and enhances sensation



# Sensate Focus exercises



A  
R  
O  
U  
S  
A  
L

- Series of homework assignments, practiced 15–30 minutes per exercise
- Couple agrees not to engage in intercourse
- Beginning exercises usually focus on heightened sensory awareness, to **touch, sight, sound and smell**

## **Sample Exercise:**

- Each partner gives the other a massage, clothed. Clients are instructed to enjoy company; not to focus on arousal.
- Each partner gives the other a massage, unclothed. Partner communicates likes/disliked. Clients are instructed to enjoy company; not to focus on arousal.

# ORGASM

- EROS
- Vibrator: pocket rocket



O  
R  
G  
A  
S  
M

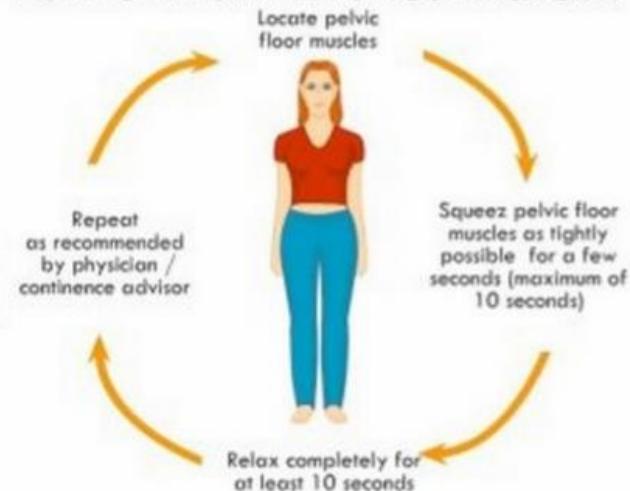
# ➤ Pelvic Floor Physical Therapy (PFPT)



## ➤ Kegel exercises

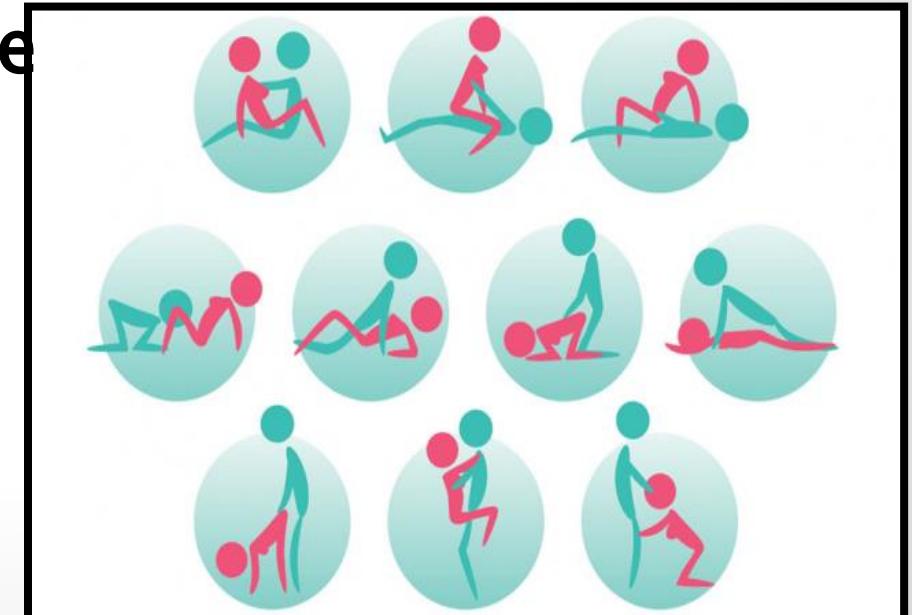
### Kegels

#### HOW TO PERFORM PELVIC FLOOR EXERCISES



# P A I N

- Emotional distress
- PFPT
- Lubricant
- Avoid deep thrusting
- Consider the couple
- Change positions



# **Sex Therapy**

## **Multidisciplinary Care**

- ▶ Sex therapy is a range of therapeutic processes which may be used to initiate, to restore and to enrich both the sexuality and the sexual components of intimate relationships
- ▶ Goal of sex therapy is to help integrate new medical interventions into sexual routine
  - Psychosexual education
  - Communication about sexual concerns
  - Behavioral intervention
  - Cognitive restructuring

A photograph of a man and a woman standing close together, forming a heart shape with their bodies against a bright, blurred background. A pink circle with a blue border is overlaid on the lower part of the image, containing the text.

**“The best sex  
happens  
when partners  
can  
communicate  
about  
their needs.”**

# Evaluating Sexual Beliefs

## Cognitive Behavioral Therapy

### Maladaptive Beliefs

- ▶ There's only one way to have sex
- ▶ I had some good years, it's (sex) over now
- ▶ Nobody is attracted to someone who's sick
- ▶ Sex might make my condition worse...
- ▶ I should just be grateful I'm alive
- ▶ Sex must be spontaneous

### Adaptive Beliefs

- ▶ Sex can still feel good
- ▶ I don't have to have an orgasm to feel satisfied
- ▶ Sex is a part of life no matter how old I am
- ▶ Planning for sex can be part of the fun

# Sexual Problems are Pervasive and Persistent

- Loss of desire/pleasure, vaginal dryness/pain, trouble reaching orgasm
- Multifactorial: physical, psychological, social
- Rarely go away without treatment
- Fewer than 20% see health care professional

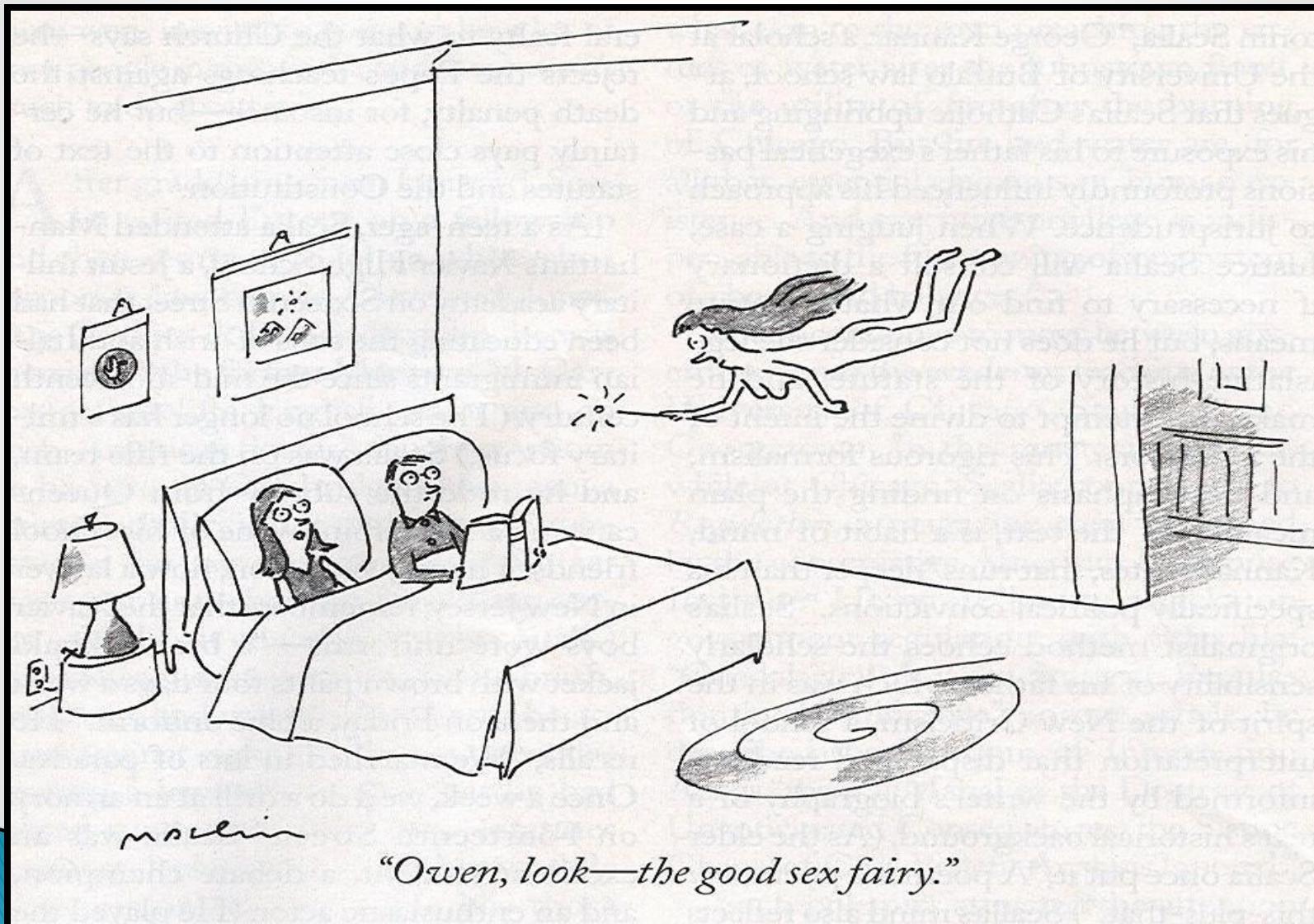




# Barriers to Getting Help

- Oncology clinics are overburdened
- Poor insurance coverage for sex
- Few gynecologists have interest or expertise
- Few Mental health professionals cross-trained in sex therapy and psycho-oncology
- Few multidisciplinary clinics

# Getting Help ASK!



# Getting Help

➤ American Cancer Society



➤ online community for gynecologic cancers

- <http://www.ovarian.org/>
- <https://www.sharecancersupport.org>
- <https://www.bebrcaware.com>

➤ Look for AASECT (American Association of Sex Educators, Counselors, Therapists) credentials and/or couple therapist who has experience with cancer

# Take Home Notes on Sex

- ▶ Sexuality is a part of every person...from before they were born until they die.
- ▶ Sexuality is a quality of life issue.
- ▶ Each person has a right to their sexuality.



**THANK YOU!**

