Young Adults With Cancer Experience Sexual Dysfunction

Researchers recommend that doctors discuss this problem at various points throughout treatment.

March 9, 2018 By Alicia Green

Cancer can affect a person's sex drive and sexual function. Now, recent findings published in the journal Cancer suggest that more than half of young adults with the disease experience sexual dysfunction, reports Healio.

For the study, investigators analyzed data from 123 individuals ages 18 to 39 who were diagnosed with various types of cancer, including leukemia, breast cancer and soft tissue sarcoma.

Participants in the study completed a survey to assess their sexual functioning within the first four months of cancer diagnosis, at six months and at two years. (The number of individuals who completed the survey decreased over time.)

Researchers found that more than 50 percent of young adult patients experienced sexual dysfunction at baseline and at their six-month follow-up. What's more, 52 percent of participants reported problems with sexual functioning even after two years.

Sexual dysfunction also increased over time and was greater for women, older patients, those who were married or in a committed relationship and those who had undergone chemotherapy.

"When it comes to sexual functioning, this conversation should occur at various times throughout treatment, and to do this, we need to build trust between health care providers and young adults with cancer," said Chiara Acquati, PhD, MSW, a researcher involved in the study and assistant professor at Graduate College of Social Work at University of Houston.

Acquati also suggests developing interventions based on a patient's preferences and urges further research to assess how cancer affects the sex lives of men, women and transgender young people differently.

"We hope that our study will contribute to the discussion about the development of interventions for young adults by identifying the patients who are most likely to benefit from different types of psychosocial support and when support is mostly needed throughout the continuum of care," she

concluded.

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