

# Empower - Menopause and Cancer Survivorship Pathway

## Loses Arising from Menopause

### Fact Sheet

#### Loss of Fertility

Permanent menopause can mean that one will lose their ability to have children. Fertility is the ability to get pregnant and give birth to a baby. The parts of the reproductive system that are involved in fertility include the ovaries, fallopian tubes, uterus, cervix and vagina. Once a month during the menstrual cycle the ovaries release an egg, this process is called ovulation. This process happens until menopause when the process no longer happens. Therefore, when one undergoes menopause, they experience infertility. The loss of the ability to conceive can be very difficult for women to come to terms with.

<https://www.macmillan.org.uk/cancer-information-and-support/impacts-of-cancer/fertility-in-women>

#### Self-Esteem

Certain symptoms of menopause can negatively affect your self-esteem. This is largely due to the physical symptoms that can come with menopause.

Practicing skills to increase your confidence is very important. These skills can include staying physically active, completing relaxation techniques, remaining busy with a regimented schedule, and doing things for yourself that you enjoy. The last one is especially effective in boosting self-esteem.

Undergoing menopause at an early age can have a greater effect on self-esteem, body image and general self-perception.

Exercise can be very helpful in improving self-image. The goal does not have to be weight loss, the mental impacts of physical activity on their own can increase confidence.

<https://www.menopause.org/for-women/menopauseflashes/women's-health-and-menopause/get-positive-about-body-image>

#### Body Image

Loss of sense of “completeness” as a woman through surgery and other changes. A changing body – including many unwanted changes: weight gain, facial hair growth, sweating, skin changes.

Loss of a feeling of youthfulness – pre-menopausal bodies seen by society as being more desirable and youthful

Often cancer brings physical changes through surgery or other effects such as hair loss. The menopause can add to this, overall leaving women feeling that they have lost the image they had of their own bodies.

### **Loss of Youthfulness.**

For many women, menopause is constructed as something that is experienced by “old” women. Creates a sense of accelerated ageing. Being at a life stage that feels unexpected and inconsistent with peers. Fatigue and low mood can reinforce this....

### **Sense of Self**

Many women report unpredictable mood swings; lack of emotional stability (including anxiety, depression, irritability); and difficulty to present oneself as calm or in control.

### **Sexual Losses / Low Libido**

Many women in menopause report physical changes which make sex more difficult (Parton et al, 2017). Women report their libido is lower or non-existent. Sexual confidence can be affected by body changes, not feeling attractive anymore. This is in addition to potential losses from cancer eg. pain and surgery

### **Loss of Connectedness**

A change in how you relate to others – friends, partner, children. Friends may be at very different life stages - menopause feels far off; friends going through menopause – still different. A feeling of “nobody gets it”.

Partners feel left out and don’t know how to be supportive.

When cancer treatment is over, partners are focused on getting back to normal – greatest divergence in experience (Lethborg et al, 2003).

### **Difficulties in loss compounded by cancer and menopause**

Many of the losses around menopause are invisible to others. This may be contradicted by others, particularly in the context of cancer “You look great!” or “You must be so delighted to have moved past it”. Results in a feeling of needing to hide sadness. Can also result in second-guessing - Am I overreacting?

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