

Sexual Recovery: Education and Sexual Aids

Sex-Positive Education

Popular culture often provides artificial images and unrealistic expectations of women's bodies and sexual activity. This can lead to shame, embarrassment and difficulties engaging fully with sexual activity. Sex educators such as Betty Dodson have worked to provide accurate, sex-positive, and body-positive education that addresses common misconceptions. These are some resources that may help people understand that there is a wide range of "normal" sexual reproductive organs (e.g., vulva styles) and that the majority of women require clitoral stimulation (rather than just penetration) to achieve orgasm.

Helpful websites:

- <https://dodsonandross.com>
- <https://www.omgyes.com/>
- <https://www.bloodandmilk.com/category/sex-intimacy/>
- <https://www.dana-farber.org/health-library/articles/sexual-health,-intimacy,-and-cancer/>



Sexual Rehabilitation

As with after many medical treatments, some sexual rehabilitation may be required after cancer treatment. For example, cancer treatment or other changes in your body (e.g., menopause) may cause symptoms such as vaginal dryness or discomfort with sexual activity. Please see our other teaching sheet for information on addressing vaginal dryness.

When you experience pain or discomfort during sexual activity, your pelvic floor muscles may tense, causing sexual activity to become even more painful. This automatic muscle clenching of the pelvic floor can also make pelvic exams painful. There is pelvic floor rehabilitation which can directly help people learn to relax the pelvic floor and regain control of these muscles. Vaginal dilators are often a key component of pelvic floor rehabilitation. Dilators are used methodically to slowly help tissue become more elastic and improve vaginal capacity, which- can significantly reduce pain with sexual

activity. This can be either done on your own or with the guidance of a pelvic floor physical therapist. Please refer to our Pelvic Floor Therapist Guide for potential physical therapists in your area.

The screenshot shows the Intimate Rose website's product page for vaginal dilators. At the top, there is a navigation bar with contact information (888-534-7673), a search bar, and links for 'CLINICIAN SAMPLES' and 'LOGIN'. Below the navigation bar is the Intimate Rose logo and a menu with categories: 'Dilators', 'Pelvic Wands', 'Kegel Weights', 'More Products', 'Guides', and 'Community & Mission'. The main heading is 'VAGINAL DILATORS'. A descriptive paragraph states that the dilators are made from smooth, body-safe, medical-grade silicone that is 100% BPA free and designed for comfort. An FDA Registered logo is shown with the text: 'Not only are the Intimate Rose vaginal dilators more comfortable and easier to use, but they are also the only FDA registered vaginal silicone dilator and are used in the official Academy of Pelvic Health training courses.' A 'Sort by price' dropdown menu is visible. Three product sets are displayed in separate boxes: 'FULL VAGINAL DILATOR SET 8 SIZES' for \$179.99, 'SMALL VAGINAL DILATORS SET' for \$79.99, and 'MEDIUM VAGINAL DILATOR SET' for \$99.99. Each box contains an image of the dilators in various colors (purple, blue, green, yellow, pink).

The screenshot shows the Milli website's product page for a vibrating dilator. The Milli logo is at the top left, followed by navigation links: 'Home', 'About Us', 'Product/Service', 'Contact Us', and 'New Train'. The product image is a white, handheld vibrating dilator with a digital display and buttons. Four callout boxes describe its features: 'Self-controlled buttons with a digital tracking display', 'Optional low and high vibration', '18mm to 40mm adjustable gradual sizing', and 'Soft silicone coating'.

A single vibrating dilator (e.g., <https://milliforher.com/>) that can also be adjusted to different sizes (by the millimeter) is an alternative to using separate dilators of increasing sizes.

Pelvic floor physical therapists may also work with women on trigger point release and tender point pain using a vibrating wand. <https://www.intimaterose.com/collections/pelvic-wands>

The product page for the Intimate Rose Pelvic Floor Wand & Massage Therapy Tool features a large image of a purple, curved, flexible wand. The Intimate Rose logo is in the top left. The price is listed as \$29.99, and it has a 5-star rating from 77 reviews. A note states 'This item qualifies for FREE SHIPPING IN USA'. The product title is 'PELVIC FLOOR WAND & MASSAGE THERAPY TOOL'. The description explains that the wand is made of silky smooth, medical-grade silicone and was designed by a pelvic physical therapist to relieve trigger points in the pelvic floor muscles, specifically the obturator internus and puborectalis muscles. A bulleted list highlights the product's benefits: 'Silky smooth medical-grade silicone for comfortable insertion and removal', 'Uniquely sized ends are perfect for men or women', and 'Shaped to reach both superficial and deep pelvic floor muscles for relief of pelvic pain'.

Pain can also occur during sexual activity when penetration is too deep (e.g., after surgery for cervical cancer shortens the vagina). The Ohnut (<https://ohnut.co/>) is a wearable ring placed at the base of a partner's penis to customize penetration depth and reduce pain. This is also sold at the Friend's Boutique: https://www.dana-farberfriendsplace.org/store/p453/Ohnut_Set.html.



Sexual Aids

Although some women can orgasm through penetration alone, most women need direct clitoral stimulation to achieve orgasm. Clitoral stimulation can be done manually (e.g., using fingers or tongue) or with the use of sexual aids such as vibrators. After cancer treatment or menopause women often report that more stimulation is needed to reach orgasm due to a variety of factors (e.g., reductions in estrogen) and often women benefit from using sexual aids.

Vibrators are sexual aids which can increase the intensity of clitoral stimulation and make it easier to reach orgasm. They can be used during masturbation (self-touch) or with a partner. They also help get oxygenated blood flow to the vaginal tissue which promotes vaginal health recovery. Some vibrators are designed to be used externally, while others can be inserted into the vagina. They can range from \$15 to hundreds of dollars. *Dildos* are objects typically shaped like an erect penis that can be inserted into the vagina for sexual stimulation.

Helpful websites:

Good Vibrations: <https://www.goodvibes.com>

Dana-Farber Gift Store: https://www.dana-farberfriendsplace.org/store/p454/Intimina_Raya_Massager_.html

Amazon: https://www.amazon.com/s?k=vibrator&ref=nb_sb_noss_2

Pure Romance: <https://www.pureromance.com/Pws/homeoffice/store/OCUS/catalog/sex-toys>

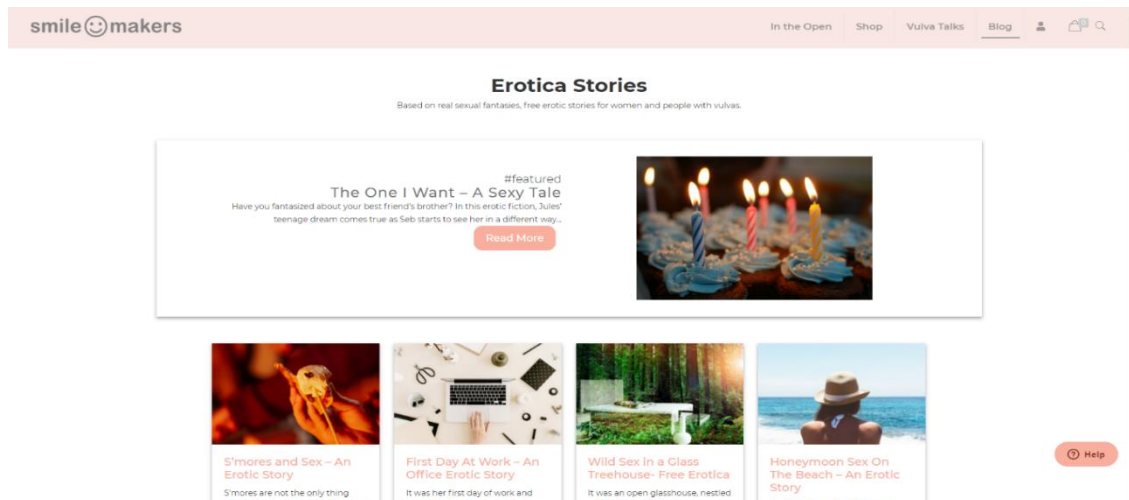


Wand Massager
(external vibrator
example)

Sexual Desire

After cancer treatment or menopause sexual desire often becomes less spontaneous. Desire is certainly diminished if you have pain or discomfort with sexual activity or if you feel worried about intimacy. However, desire is also an experience that can be cultivated. After you have addressed any issues causing pain (e.g., successfully started using a vaginal moisturizer to address vaginal dryness, improving pelvic floor health) you may want to focus on enhancing desire and increasing sensual experience. Erotica, literature or art intended to arouse sexual desire, may be helpful in cultivating desire.

Erotic Literature (e.g., *romance novels*) can help us engage in sexual fantasy and cultivate sexual desire. This literature has been designed for all types of fantasies and can be found in the romance section of bookstores as well as online.



Helpful Websites:

Smile Makers: <https://smilemakerscollection.com/blog/category/erotica-for-women/>

Bellesa: <https://www.bellesa.co/story/all>

Barnes and Noble: https://www.barnesandnoble.com/b/books/romantic-fiction-themes/erotic-romance/_/N-29Z8q8Z17zj

Erotic Videos can also be a very effective way of exploring fantasy alone or with a partner. Although the majority of pornography is designed for men, there are some websites designing erotic videos specifically for women that are body- and sex-positive.

Helpful Websites:

Erika Lust: <https://erikalust.com/>

XConfessions: <https://xconfessions.com/>

Crashpad Queer Porn: <https://crashpadseries.com/queer-porn/>

Bright Desire: <https://brightdesire.com/tour/>



Additional Resources about Sexual Health for Cancer Survivors

Dana-Farber Cancer Institute: <https://www.dana-farber.org/for-patients-and-families/care-and-treatment/support-services-and-amenities/sexual-health-program/>

National Cancer Institute: <https://www.cancer.gov/publications/patient-education/facing-forward>

OncoLink <https://www.oncolink.org/support/sexuality-fertility/sexuality>

American Cancer Society: <https://www.cancer.org/treatment/treatments-and-side-effects/physical-side-effects/fertility-and-sexual-side-effects/sexuality-for-women-with-cancer.html>

Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center: <https://www.mskcc.org/cancer-care/patient-education/>

Woman Lab <https://womanlab.org>

