

Patient information factsheet

Teenage and young adult (TYA) cancer care

Sexual health advice

If you're in a sexual relationship here's what you need to know.

Is it ok to have sex while having chemo?

It's fine to continue having sex while on chemotherapy if you wish, though it is common to lose interest for a variety of reasons. Please talk to your partner about this. However, there are some things you need to be aware of.

Condoms are essential

Always use a condom to protect your partner from being exposed to chemo, even if you're using other forms of contraception. This is important all the way through chemo. A condom should also be used for oral or anal sex.

It's really important to avoid pregnancy

You need to avoid getting pregnant or fathering a child while having chemo and for one year afterwards. This is because chemo drugs can damage eggs and sperm, and can harm an unborn child.

Sometimes periods stop while you're having chemo, but you can still get pregnant. So it's essential to use reliable contraception no matter what stage of treatment you are in or what chemo you have had.

Taking the pill

Because the contraceptive pill has been linked to an increased risk of blood clots, it's best to avoid taking it during chemo, and use condoms instead.

If you would like more advice about contraception during chemo, talk to your nurse specialist, hospital doctor or GP.

STIs

If you think you might have a sexually transmitted infection (for example you have symptoms such as warts, itching or discharge) get it checked out. Don't keep any worries to yourself - talk to someone you trust.

If your platelets are low

Platelets stop bleeding by helping blood clot and repairing damaged blood vessels. Having a low number can lead to problems with bruising and bleeding, so if you've been told that your platelet count is low (below 50), it's important to take care during any sexual activity (with or without a partner) to minimise the risk of bruising or bleeding.

Who to contact

TYA nurse specialist on: **07920 708342**

Acute oncology service (24-hour helpline): **07867 973649**

NHS national sexual health helpline (free): **0300 123 7123**

Useful links

www.brook.org.uk

www.macmillan.org.uk

www.cancerresearchuk.org

If you need a translation of this document, an interpreter or a version in large print, Braille or on audio tape, please telephone 023 8120 4688 for help.