

Sexual function does not continuously decline after radiation therapy treatments for prostate cancer

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Sexual function in prostate cancer patients receiving external beam radiation therapy (EBRT) decreases within the first two years after treatment but then stabilizes and does not continuously decline as was previously thought, according to a study in the January 1 issue of the *International Journal of Radiation Oncology*Biophysics**, the official journal of the American Society for Radiation Oncology (ASTRO).

Prostate cancer is the most common male cancer other than skin cancer. It can be effectively treated using multiple methods, including prostatectomy, brachytherapy and EBRT, so the long-term side effects are often used by patients and doctors as deciding factors when choosing a treatment.

Changes in [sexual function](#) are some of the more common side effects from prostate cancer treatments, but the degree to which EBRT affects function varies widely, depending on the study.

In a first of its kind study, researchers at the Jefferson Medical College of Thomas Jefferson University in Philadelphia, the Thomas Jefferson University Hospital Department of Radiation Oncology in Philadelphia and the University of California, Davis, School of Medicine Department of Radiation Oncology in Sacramento, Calif., evaluated 143 [prostate cancer](#) patients receiving EBRT who completed baseline data on sexual function before treatment and at follow-up visits.

Patients were analyzed on sexual drive, erectile function, ejaculatory function and overall satisfaction for a median time of about four years. The study authors found that the strongest predictor of sexual function after treatment was sexual function before treatment and the only statistically significant decrease in function occurred in the first two years after treatment and

then stabilized with no significant changes thereafter.

"Treatment-related side effects, especially sexual function, have a significant effect on a patient's quality of life and satisfaction with their overall outcome," Richard Valicenti, M.D., M.A., senior author on the study and professor and chair of [radiation oncology](#) at the University of California, Davis, School of Medicine. "The results of this study allow patients and their partners to have a fuller understanding of the long-term sexual side effects of EBRT and what they can expect after treatment, which should aid in deciding on a treatment course."

Provided by American Society for Radiation Oncology

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