



Understanding Sexual Desire

This handout offers you information on sexual desire. The social worker will use the diagram on page 2 to talk with you about sexual desire.

Sexual desire is:

- An interest in intimate or sexual activity
- Also called libido or sexual attraction
- Can be different from one person to another
- Can be affected by your situation

Cancer and cancer treatments can cause you to lose your sexual desire.

You may have lost sexual desire:

- If you are not interested in intimate or sexual activity
- If your partner is always the one to start intimate or sexual activity

Everyone has a sexual response cycle. Your sexual response cycle has four phases. It includes desire, arousal, orgasm and resolution.

Desire Phase

“Spontaneous” or unplanned desire happens with a mentally interest in having intimate or sexual activity. “Responsive desire” happens during intimate or sexual activity.

You may experience difficulty with spontaneous desire as a result of your cancer or cancer treatment. You may need to focus on “responsive desire”. You can become aroused with intimate and sexual touching if the setting and situation is right for you.

Arousal, Orgasm and Resolution Phases

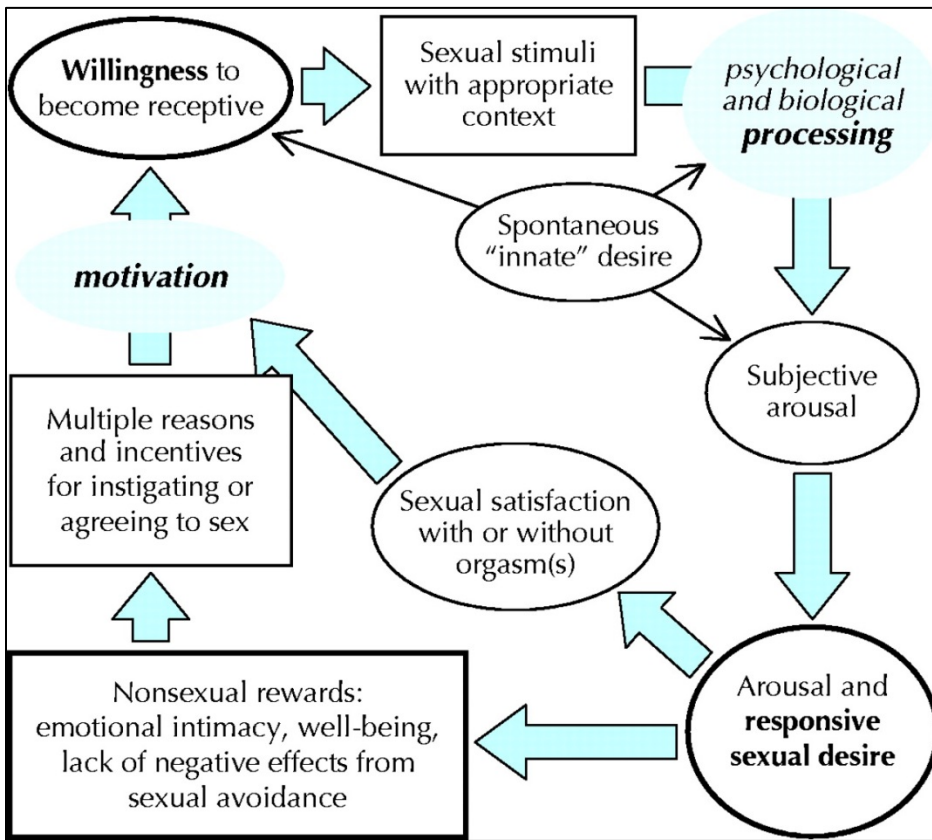
These phases include the physical responses happening with sexual activity. Not everyone reaches orgasm or resolution. You may not experience the needed physical changes in your body for orgasm or resolution.

It can be helpful to think about non-sexual rewards important to you during sexual activity. They include:

- Emotional intimacy
- Your body’s responses

As you process the feelings, sensations and enjoyable moments of sexual activity, you will learn what gives you pleasure.

This new way of looking at your sexual cycle can help motivate you to explore your sexual health. This can lead to an increased desire for intimate or sexual activity between you and your partner.



Last reviewed: March 2021

Handout adapted with permission from the Southeast Regional Cancer Program.