

New Connections

HELPING YOU FIND YOUR WAY THROUGH TREATMENT



Issue 18

A Prostate Cancer Survivor and His Wife

Learn the True Meaning of Intimacy

It was 1995, and Keith and Virginia Laken were in their 28th year of marriage, one they would both have described as loving, intimate, and sexual. Then came the diagnosis of prostate cancer. Keith balked at the potential side effects of treatment and very nearly chose a shorter life with no surgery over a longer one with a diminished sex life.

Fortunately, despite his reservations, Keith did go ahead with treatment – a radical prostatectomy, removal of the entire prostate gland.

A Return to Work, But Not to Sex

The surgery was successful, and after seven weeks, Keith returned to work. Both he and Virginia assumed that he would have a quick return to sexual functioning, too. He didn't. Four months without sex made Virginia appreciate the integral role sex had played in their marriage. "Making love was what we did to reconnect when things weren't going well and how we celebrated when they were," said Virginia. "Without sex, we had felt isolated from each other."

Helpful Professional Counseling

Five months after surgery, Keith started penile injections to help achieve an erection. Although the injections worked well, Keith and Virginia had to get used to the lack of spontaneity and face the reality of life-long impotence. Keith also struggled with a loss of physical desire that affected more than their lovemaking. He was unhappy, negative, and angry.

Finally, Keith and Virginia consulted a psychologist who specialized in male sexual dysfunction. The psychologist assured them they were on the right path because they were talking to each other and sorting out their feelings together. He pointed out what they were doing right: They had acknowledged that their lovemaking needs had changed and that they had to become more creative.

The psychologist helped them further by encouraging them to focus on pleasure, not intercourse. He also helped Keith understand his lack of desire, explaining that men in his condition need to become more attentive to what their brains are saying versus what their bodies are saying.

Scheduled "Sex Days"

Keith and Virginia began, and continue, to approach lovemaking more deliberately with scheduled sex days. "We make sure our lovemaking takes place, even though our bodies are not driving us to make love – our minds are," said Virginia. "We realize that lovemaking is so important to our marriage that we set aside the time."

Writing the Book on Lovemaking

It took Keith and Virginia three years to reach their understanding and their solution. The difficulty of the journey

prompted them to write a book, *Making Love Again*, and they now speak to cancer survivors all across the country about their experience. Their openness has served them well. More than 10 years after Keith's diagnosis and treatment, the Lakens' marriage is still thriving.

“With persistence and redefining intimacy, you can have a wonderful relationship,” said Keith, who remains cancer-free. “But keep touching, keep being intimate, keep making love, in whatever form lovemaking takes.”

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