

Illness need not eliminate personal relationships

By Alison Bailin Batz

Roses are Red

Violets are Blue

Fighting Cancer is Hard

Even with a Love Like You

Each February, it seems as though the world sees red ... in a good way.

"But, whether single or in a relationship, this day can be tough – even tougher for those fighting illnesses, like cancer," said Dr. Murali Murty of Arizona Breast Cancer Specialists in Scottsdale. "While those we love are busy fighting serious diseases, things like intimacy can fall by the wayside, both physical and emotional."

Here is a look at three key areas of "love" and recommendations on how to deal with matters of the heart if either fighting illness – or loving someone who is.

Sex

Serious diseases such as cancer and diabetes can make the physical act of having sex difficult or impossible. This is especially true among those fighting a disease focused in or near a sex organ such as ovarian, testicular and gynecological cancers.

Simply put, some diseases make the act of intercourse impossible.

Diabetes can impact both sexes in a similar way, sometimes restricting blood flow to the point of erectile dysfunction or loss of lubrication.

And, breast cancer patients can lose a great deal of sensation in their chests, a pleasure center for many women, making the act of sex less appealing or less satisfying.

So, does a couple's sex life simply end while one is fighting disease?

Absolutely not.

The key during this sensitive time is understanding and communication.

"The patient must make the effort to communicate their loss of libido or ability to maintain arousal, while the partner must communicate their continued desire for the person has not waned during illness,"

Murty said. "Then, both partners must understand that sex as they both know it will need to change, at least temporarily."

Sexuality

Certainly, the physical act of sex can be difficult enough during illness. But, it can be the desire to have sex that wanes, often due to a complete loss of sexuality from weight gain, scarring, hormones, et al.

During a cancer battle, for example, emotions are running high – and self perceptions can run dangerously low.

Murty said while in the acute phase, some of the most common side effects that drain sexuality are: weight gain or loss, depression, pain, anxiety, fatigue, altered sex organs and/or altered sense of self.

While there is no magic mojo pill to help, there are support systems ready and waiting to talk to the patient and the partner, who can also lose his/her sense of sexuality while tending to patient needs and becoming the primary caregiver.

While the patient's doctor should have a handy list of recommendations, the Wellness Community (www.twccaz.org) has resources in a group setting. And, one-on-one and/or couples counseling can be critical at this time.

Intimacy

From kissing to the sharing inside jokes or fears, intimacy is at the core of all relationships. It includes all of the physicality of sex and emotions of sexuality.

"The loss of this crucial element in a relationship often means the eventual loss of the relationship itself," Murty said.

But, keeping intimacy alive during illness is hardly a walk in the park. It means the patient has to share fears about the future and health rather than going through the motions of everyday life.

It also means the partner must share frustrations and fears as well. It means sweating the small stuff together – often.

Loved ones deserve to be a part of the process of disease: The good, the bad and the ugly.

Sticking with chocolate better for dental health

By Michelle Milan

Heart-shaped chocolates and candies. Candlelit dinners with wine, champagne and sweets. Valentine's Day is full of romance, but may not be so sweet on teeth.

Some candies and drinks are safer than others when it comes to healthy teeth.

"Candy and sugar is a source for bacteria and a fuel that eats the tooth," said Dr. Viray Patel from Arcadia Dental Group. "If it's eaten and not rinsed out, that begins the process of a cavity."

The most damage comes if plaque stays in the mouth for 24 hours, said Dr. Stephen

Conrad from Dr. Stephen J. Conrad, Phoenix Cosmetic & Implant Family Dentistry. It will build up and become more invasive.

"A colony of bacteria is like mold and you have to break it up," Conrad said.

Most importantly, hard candy has a tendency to stick to teeth especially to the little bumps and ridges, he said. This creates more opportunity for plaque, tartar, dental decay and gum disease.

The long-term buildup of hard tartar needs to be removed by a dentist or dental

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The recent recession has left many American families struggling to maintain their lifestyle and save for the future, according to a recent survey by the Consumer Federation of America (CFA) and Certified Financial Planner Board of Standards, Inc. (CFP Board).

At the same time, the survey shows that those who have prepared a personal financial plan feel more confident and optimistic, and report more success than those who have not.



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