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## Getting Your Groove Back: For Women in Partnered Relationships

Erin Hoschouer-Lapham

February 23, 2008

### LINDSAY AVNER:

My name is Lindsay Avner, and I am so delighted to be here with you guys today. I am the co-chair of the Young Women's National Advisory Council for Susan G. Komen for the Cure [<http://www.komen.org>]. This is such a blessing to have Komen as a part of the conference this year. We have a great session in store for you guys today. I am excited to introduce an amazing, amazing speaker. Erin Lapham is an American Association of Sexuality, Educators, Counselors and Therapists Certified Sexuality Educator and the director of health education at Pure Romance, Inc., a woman-to-woman-based business specializing in intimacy-related products and resources [<http://www.pureromance.com>].

She previously worked as an intern at the Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender and Reproduction in Bloomington, Indiana [<http://www.kinseyinstitute.org>]. Her area of graduate study included sexual health, sexuality education and intimacy after cancer. She has presented on intimacy after cancer to national organizations, survivor groups and healthcare providers for the past three years. She is executive director of the Patty Brisben Foundation [<http://pattybrisbenfoundation.com>], a non-profit group specializing in education, community outreach and research to improve women's healthcare.

### ERIN HOSCHOUER-LAPHAM:

I'm not director anymore.

### LINDSAY AVNER:

Just before we get started, Erin's going to go through her presentation. We have a lot of fun in store. We're going to do Q&A after. With that, I'll turn it over to Erin.

### ERIN HOSCHOUER-LAPHAM:

Hi, everybody. As Lindsay said, thank you for the very nice introduction. My name is Erin Lapham, and I am a certified sexuality educator, as well as being a representative from Pure Romance. We do do a lot of outreach and trying to educate women on how to recapture their sensual and sexual selves after something like breast cancer diagnosis and treatment. So I really, really hope that at the end of today's session you walk away with some really valuable information on how you can move forward on your journey through your sexual self-discovery, have some fun again and enjoy it, because that's really what it's all about. So I'm really hoping that at the end of today we have a different sort of outlook on how to overcome some of these things.

Everyone should have gotten a folder on their chair. I'm going to go over what's inside of it, and then we're going to do some things to get us warmed up a little. It's kind of like foreplay. We're going to build into all of this, because we know this is a very intimate topic. We're going to be very candid today, because I want you to go home with some really, really fantastic information, but we've got to kind of be open minded about it, too. In your packet you will see a copy of my presentation, so if you don't feel like taking notes today, you want to just listen and take it all in, it's a lot. So I want you to be able to take it home with you and to be able to read it, share it with friends, family or partner, things like that. There are also some more information sheets about what is intimacy and cancer and what resources are available to me, so you can take those things home, too. A set of our brochures about before, during and after cancer, what happens to that body and what does that do to my sexuality.

On the other side of the packet you've got an article, although this presentation did say for couples, this is about the woman and how to cope with the changes. So some of you may not be in a

partnered relationship, and the relationship you're working on is the one with yourself, and that's awesome. So there is an article in here about dating after cancer. It can be done. So there is some information as well as a couple of activities, one that's about body image, how to overcome and be okay with who you are on the outside, because we all know you're fantastic on the inside. Then an activity for a woman and her partner about the simple things. Let's take it back to the simple things. And we'll talk about that. So you've got all of that as well as my contact information, so if you don't want to ask your question today, you can call me or e-mail me at any time, and I promise you that if I don't know the answer I'll find somebody who does.

Finally, you've got this pink sheet of paper, and that's what we're going to use right now. So if everyone can get that out. We're going to do a couple of sort of icebreaker things, because as we're talking about communication and intimacy and how that impacts your relationship, whether that's relationship with yourself or your relationship with a partner -- and when I say "partner," I mean male or female. I mean whatever works for you. We're here. We don't discriminate. We love all people and all types of relationships even if that's the relationship you have with yourself. So keep that in mind that this is open to every woman. I want everyone today to kind of open their mind to how they are as a human being and how that impacts myself as a sexual being. With that comes how I communicate with my partner or myself or my family or my friends. How does that impact me as a sexual person?

So we're going to kind of take a step back, slow down a little bit and do what I call the foreplay of the presentation and kind of warm up a little bit. So I'm going to give you four shapes. What I want you to do is immediately write down the shape that you think best describes you as a person or that you're more drawn to or just feels



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good to you. Just immediately write it down. This is no thinking. This is a gut. We're just going to do it, okay? Are we all up for this? So your four shapes are a square, a triangle, a circle or a squiggle. I want you to write the one that you think, "Oh, that's me." If you're multiple, write them both. If you can't decide, just whatever makes you feel good. So the square, triangle, circle or squiggle. Has everyone got their shape down?

So who are my squares? Awesome. You want to know what this means, right? My squares. You are our critical people. You are our complainers. You are the people who are always right, right? But you're task oriented. You work on goals. You want to get things done. When you see a challenge, you see a task, you get it done. Does that sound like any of you? You're organized, you're orderly and you're logical. So everything is methodical. It has a process, and it needs to make sense to you. You don't like teams or committees because you work best alone. You're the hardest workers, and you will be sure to tell everybody you're the hardest worker. You are cautious, and you're very cautious in your love life. You want it to be structured and methodical and make sense. And let's say you're talking about your wardrobe. You want the more monotone colors. You're not flashy in your style. The animal that would best describe you is a cat: very independent, very structured. So for those of you squares, maybe you thought, oh, a couple of those things meet me, maybe they don't. But just keep that stuff in mind.

Who are my triangles? We've got a lot of triangles in here. You guys are great with money because you're frugal. But you're leaders. You love to tell everybody else what to do. You delegate. You have a high self-esteem, and you don't think that you're wrong. You're focused. You want to know what's the point. Why am I doing this? What am I going to accomplish by doing this? You're a team player, and you want your team to succeed. Your success is based on the team succeeding. You're loyal. You're sincere. You're family oriented, but you can be a little bit possessive. You fear change. You perform better in rote. You like consistency. Your ethic: You feel fair work for fair pay. You want what's coming to you because you earned it. You are, my triangles, the greatest lovers. When it comes to your clothes and material things, you prefer few but some nice stuff. You're our Labs. If you're an animal, you're our Labs. You're loyal.

So who are my circles? You're our party people. You're the friendly. You're the cheerleader. You're

always up. You're always going. You're outgoing. You're social. You're the peacemakers, the middleman. You always want to make everybody happy. Your goal at work is to have fun. At the end of the day if you have fun, that's what counts. You have outfits for every holiday. You're flashy; you're fun; you just have a great time. Your motivation is social approval. You're talkative, and you don't always listen to other people because you're always talking. That's me. You get dumped on. You say, "I'll do it. I can't say no. I can figure it out. I'll get it done." You can be whiners and martyrs and will probably have a mid-life crisis. Take on the world, you're going to have a hard time with that. But you pay attention to detail. Your motto on sex? Any time, anywhere. So find yourself a triangle and it will be perfect. And your clothes, you prefer to be comfortable. It's all about feeling good. And your animal, you're best described as the Golden Retriever, the pleaser.

So finally, where are my squiggles? Yeah. You are our visionaries. You are direct, to the point, but can be impatient. You are result oriented. You like to get things done. That's how you measure your success, by getting something done. You're motivated by a challenge and how you can change, how you can make a difference, how you can impact. But you're not organized. No. You're the type of people who go out and buy a planter and never use it. You need somebody to slow you down. You need somebody to take a step back and tell you, hold on. Let's think this through. You don't always listen, because you think you know it all. Your attire, you're wearing that professional suit with the leopard thong underneath. You just never know what's under the cover. You're about action.

The goal of this, and many of you, if you're sitting here with your partner, maybe you're different shapes. Maybe one of you is a square where you think you're always right, and one of you is a circle who's always talking and not listening to the other person. How do you expect to communicate? How do you expect to have those really intimate, intense conversations, which is where intimacy starts is by talking, if we're not listening to one another or reacting to one another. The reason I like to do this activity is to give you an opportunity to evaluate yourself. How do I communicate? How do I exude myself? How do I talk to people? How do I express that something is wrong? Am I the type of person that takes everything on and can't say no and then gets upset when my friends or family or my partner doesn't help out? Maybe we need to ask.

It's all about communicating. So I challenge that if your partner is not with you, if you're not in a partnered relationship, you're worried about communicating with your friends, your family, your coworkers or your children, take a minute to understand how they communicate. This may be silly, we're laughing, and maybe not all of it is true to you, but I do want you to challenge yourself to think about how am I communicating with my partner, how can I do it better and how can this impact who I am as a sexual person in my relationship. So I know I'm a circle. I'm a talker. I don't always listen. I'm always trying to please people. What does that do for me when I'm faced with the challenge and the stress within my relationship? So I hope that was somewhat eye opening. We're going to do one more.

#### ERIN HOSCHOUER-LAPHAM:

Oh, the squiggles' animal. I'm so sorry. You guys are the Rottweilers. You're all about action. . .

. . . It doesn't say it, but I'm going to guess that you're a little impatient, a little frisky, so that needing somebody to slow it down, when we talk about foreplay, that may be where you need to slow it down a little. So the next thing I want you to do, this is, again, just trying to open you up about what you think about yourself, what others think about you and how that may impact your relationship. So again fun, silly, meant to just kind of get you thinking. The first thing I want you to do is on a piece of paper write down your favorite animal. Like I said, don't overanalyze this. This is just for fun. Write down your favorite animal and three things that describe your favorite animal, three descriptive words. Like I said, just quick, do it; get it down on paper.

For number two, I want you to write down your favorite color and the three words that describe your favorite color. For the third question, I want you to write down your favorite body of water and three descriptive words about your favorite body of water. Is it an ocean, a lake, your bathtub, a river, stream, the puddle? I don't know. Your favorite body of water. And three words to describe it, yes, absolutely. For the last one, I want everyone to kind of close your eyes for a second and visualize waking up in a white room. There are no doors, no windows, just four walls, a floor and a ceiling, all white. You're surrounded by a white light in this room with no doors, windows, etcetera, to the walls, ceiling and floor. I want you to write down three descriptive words or feelings about how you feel about this room.



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Are we ready to see what this all means? So the first one, the animal and how you described it, that's how you see yourself. How you described that animal is how you see yourself. Anyone care to share?

**WOMAN:**

I chose a big cat, a jaguar.

**ERIN HOSCHOUER-LAPHAM:**

She chose a big cat or a jaguar.

**WOMAN:**

Sleek, sexy and independent.

**ERIN HOSCHOUER-LAPHAM:**

Sleek, sexy and independent. I can't think of three better words. That's awesome. So the second one, the color and the three words that you used to describe that color, that's how others view you. Then lots of people have lots of good things to say about you. Now, the body of water. Are you ready for this? Those three descriptive words that you used for your body of water. Those are your views on sex.

**ERIN HOSCHOUER-LAPHAM:**

So you're that specific. What are the three that you described?

**MAN:**

What lives there is actually very buried, because I go scuba diving in the China Sea. So that's my favorite body of water.

**ERIN HOSCHOUER-LAPHAM:**

Awesome. And you said it was colorful.

**MAN:**

If you're ever gone scuba diving, you understand what's actually down there, and the population is very varied, very wide down there.

**ERIN HOSCHOUER-LAPHAM:**

That's fantastic. I hope that's your view on sex. Awesome. He said he was very varied. That's awesome. So then for the last one, how you described this room, you felt about this room, how you felt in this room, they say, is how you view death. Was it calming to you or did it scare you? What I hope is that this gets you thinking about how you feel about you, how a partner or other people may feel about you. We sometimes forget the good things. We sometimes get bogged down so much in our lives about the stresses and what we have to do and where we have to be that we sometimes forget how wonderful we are and how wonderful people think we are. So I hope that some of those words really did resonate with you

and kind of bring that warmth back in, because that's what intimacy is, that kind of warmth you have. I hope that maybe those things that you wrote down about sex aren't how you feel but it gets you thinking about how you do feel and how to talk about it. And the same thing with death. It gets you talking about it, because talking is where we're going to start all of this with, because that's where intimacy starts. So we'll get going.

So here is what we're going to do today. We're going to talk about the effects cancer has on your sensuality. Notice how I don't use the word "sex." We're going to talk about your sensuality, because it's more than just intercourse. It's more than just being with a partner. It's more than just the sex part of it. It's a lot more, so we're going to talk about that. We're going to talk about what's available to you. This isn't a lost cause. You've hit a bump in the road and we're going to help you get over it. We're going to talk about the importance of communication and foreplay. Huge. Huge things. A lot of times the first thing that gets overlooked.

We're going to talk about what resources are available to you, the issues that you're facing, specifically to your physical changes of your body. What's out there, what can you trust, how to find it, how to use it and make it work for you. We're going to talk about what other solutions are available, other things that you can be analyzing to move forward. I want you to know that when it comes to intimacy there is no quick fix. There is no pill that we can take. It is a journey. And just like from puberty until now it took you a while to figure out who you were and how you worked and something disrupted it, it's going to be a journey for the rest of your life to figure that out, and it's always going to change. That's the beauty of it. Have some fun with this process. This isn't meant to be a monotonous process. This isn't meant to be stressful. This is meant to be fun. We're talking about being intimate with ourselves and with another person. This is about having a good time. So don't forget that. Don't lose sight of that. If it doesn't work out the way you want it to, don't focus on that. Focus on what you did to get there and how much fun it could be. So we're going to talk about that and hopefully you'll walk away feeling good about what's ahead of you and just enjoying the journey.

So the effects. We know that there is an effect, and a lot of times we focus on the physical. We know there is an effect to our physical, whether it's

low libido, whether it's vaginal dryness, whether it's fatigue. We know that there's a physical effect. There is also an emotional effect, an emotional effect on all involved. There is also a social impact. What are our responsibilities as a partner? I get so many women talking about, "I feel guilty. I feel guilty because I'm not in the mood. I feel guilty because my partner can't please me the same way that they used to." And we harbor that guilt. So what does that do to you not just physically but emotionally and socially and how can we overcome those things.

The big question is can we. We absolutely believe yes. We have thousands of women who have just taken some time, taken a step back, enjoyed themselves, reevaluated what was right for them and have had a fantastic time. So that's what we hope to accomplish today. We get a lot of questions about orgasm. The rule of thumb, and it's not true for everybody, because intimacy and sexuality is so unique. But if you could have an orgasm before, you can have an orgasm after. It may take a little more work. It may take a little more evaluation. It may take a little more time and energy. You may have to get creative. You may have to do things that you thought before you never needed or wanted or could do. You may have to challenge yourself, but it's a possibility. So if you're ready for that, we're ready to help you through that.

Some things that we need you to start doing -- like I said, it's not all going to happen today. This is a process. Hopefully you leave here with the tools to start that process. But to reevaluate what's normal for you. We get so many questions about what's normal. There is no normal. We cannot say that. If you look around this room, there are so many unique people in this room that I cannot say this will work for everybody. But I can start you on the right journey to explore and figure out what is normal for you. Some people will say sex three times a day is normal for them. Some people will say sex twice a year is normal for them. That's awesome. Just find what's normal for you and your partner that makes both of you happy. You both are enjoying it. Awesome. That's all you can ask for, right? That's probably a lot more than most people.

Know that there are resources out there, the intimacy-type products, lubricants, vaginal moisturizers. Don't be afraid to use them; they are your friend. Enjoy fantasy, role-playing, books, games, try new things. You may have to try a change in sexual position. Maybe the missionary



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position has worked for you for the last 20 years. It's time to give it up and try something else. And that's okay. We're just going to change it up and find something that works. And you may need to increase foreplay and your level of arousal. So we'll talk about all of that.

So the things that I want you to walk away with today is improve your communication and your relationship, all of the things that you can do to improve that communication, and it doesn't stop here. Get creative, be prepared to try new things. Just work on that level of communication. Increase your level of arousal. That's probably first and foremost for people. They jump right in and expect to be ready to go. There is no magic button that people push and they're ready for orgasm. If there was, someone would be a billionaire. It's harder than that, but it's worse than being harder than that because of what it provides to you, your feeling and your relationship, especially after chemotherapy, improve your natural lubrication. You're faced with challenges, with changes in hormones. Lubrication is so, so important, because if you have an instance where it's painful, you don't want to go back to that. Who would? I don't blame you. So huge, and we'll talk about all of that.

Vaginal moisturizer and why that is so important. Maybe lubricant isn't enough. Maybe you need something else. So there are resources. And your vaginal health. We take care of our bodies. We're so focused on taking care of our bodies. We don't take care of our genitals. That is an area that if you expect to feel pleasure from, whether it's with yourself or your partner, you've got to take care of it. Whether that's exercising, whether that's maintaining your regular exams, whether it's using a dilator set if necessary if you're experiencing too much pain. And we'll talk about all of those things, too. But these categories are usually where you're going to find, "That fits me. I can improve that." If you have everything perfect on there, you probably wouldn't be sitting here with us. And nobody does. There is not a person out there who can say they do this perfectly. There is always room to work and build, so we're going to work on all of these things and give you some suggestions on how to keep working on them and have fun while you're doing it.

So we're going to talk about communication, how it is so hugely important to your relationship. It is so important to keep communication open with your relationship and make sure that you're on the same page. We get so many stories from

couples who are saying, "Well, I really wanted him to hold me and kiss me and touch me, and he was sleeping in the other room, because he was scared he was going to hurt me. And we both felt this disconnect." You felt hurt and rejected and like they weren't there, and they felt like they were giving you what they needed by giving you the space because they cared about you getting well. A simple breakdown in communication can leave a gap. Then that resentment builds, so talking is huge. But it's important to have the right things in mind when you're talking. Make sure you have all of the information. You don't want to dive into a conversation where you don't have all of the things available to you to really come up with a solution that works for you. So gather as much information about what's impacting you and how you can make a difference with it.

Think about timing. It is not the right time to talk about how to improve your relationship when you're in bed trying to make love. It is not the right time to talk about it when the kids are sitting there watching TV with you. It is not the right time to talk about it at a party. You need to dedicate the time to one another, whether it's you're out to dinner together and you're having an opportunity to talk, whether you sit at the kitchen table after the kids go to bed. But you need to be in an environment where you can dedicate 100 percent of your attention to the other person, because you want to make sure they're listening and vice-versa, because you don't want to have this conversation again, right? You want to tell them once. So make sure that you think about the timing.

It can be fun. It doesn't have to be this intense conversation. Play some games. Whether you're playing it over Monopoly and you're working on things there or maybe you've had several conversations and you're ready to give more instructive conversations. Play it over some adult games. If you're playing some dice, you can give some great instructions of, "I'd like it if you'd please me here," or, "This feels good to me." That is communication. It doesn't feel like it. It feels like foreplay, but it's communication, and it's awesome. So those are all really important things to keep in mind. But you need to keep an open mind, and both people in your relationship need to keep an open mind that normal isn't always going to be the same. And you've got to be able to define it together. You've got to be on the same page about what normal means for you and your relationship.

Most importantly, and I think something that gets overlooked, is maintaining good communication with your healthcare team. They may not have all of the right answers right away, but they should and can help you get the right answers. And it may be a start of an education on your part to be pushing them to get ... but it's a good education for them, too. So keep that open communication with them, because they really are a fantastic resource, whether that's your OB-GYN, your oncologist, or if you're dealing with pain issues, your pelvic floor therapist, your sex therapist, your counselor, your pastor, whoever it is, whoever you bring in that circle of your healthcare team, talk to them, too, because they will help you feel good about you and that will translate into your relationship.

I want to tell a quick story before we talk about this. We've worked with thousands of women who are overcoming some of the very same things you guys are, and they have touched our lives in so many fantastic ways that I love being able to share how that is improving the message that we can bring to women. I had this woman come to me who had lost her mother and her brother to breast cancer and found out that she had a lump in her breast and opted to have both removed just for safekeeping and found cancer in the other breast. After two-and-a-half years of her treatment, being in remission, was still struggling with intimacy in her husband, said that they hadn't been intimate since she was diagnosed. She was really, really struggling because she felt so much pressure and so much guilt from not being able to please him the way that she had been for the 20 years they had been married.

So we sat down and we created some boundaries, we created some guidelines, because pressure is huge. Pressure to perform can impact you in a negative way, both partners. So we said, let's take this a step back and let's start thinking about what you used to enjoy about one another. Was it the kissing for 20 minutes when you just couldn't take your hands off of each other and you just ... think back to the very beginning when you just had that sort of intimacy and that connection, that you just couldn't get enough of each other. Was it the foot rubs or the back rubs or the bubble baths together, that type of relationship and that intimacy that you had that really got you going? So I said, I really challenge you, let's say, for the next three ... because she was dealing with dryness and pain and all of those things.



I said, for the next three weeks, no sex, none whatsoever. We're going to set some ground rules and some boundaries. No pressure, nothing. No sex. In those three weeks I want you to be using a vaginal moisturizer. I want you to be taking care of your body. I want you to be exercising, I want you to be sleeping well. I want you to be doing your Kegel exercises. I want you to start feeling good about you and no sex. What you can do: You can kiss; you can cuddle; you can massage; you can take bubble baths. I gave her specific guidelines, and said give it a couple of weeks of just massaging and bubble baths and kissing and then work up to maybe genital stimulation or something like that. But no pressure. No sex, no orgasm, no pressure. This is just having fun, foreplay. We're going to enjoy ourselves.

She said it lasted a week. She came to me and she said, "Erin, I broke the rules. I couldn't do it. We started taking bubble baths together. He started telling me I was beautiful. He started hugging me and kissing me. We kept making out. We couldn't stop. They have two grown boys, mind you. She said we felt like we were newlyweds again. We couldn't keep our hands off each other. Because all of the pressure was gone. She said, so I broke it in a week. I'm really sorry. But we had a good time. I didn't have an orgasm, but I didn't feel the pressure. So I had fun. Great. Not every woman always has to have an orgasm. That's a pressure that we should take off of ourselves all of the time. But did you have a good time? Did you enjoy yourself? Did you enjoy the experience? That's what counts. That's what builds intimacy. That's what builds strong relationships.

So she found that that worked for her. They still have their ups and downs. She still deals with some of her issues. But they're like newlyweds again. They're holding hands all of the time. They've been married for close to 25 years, so it can be done. But take the pressure off. Set some boundaries. Find what works for you and enjoy each other again. You'll notice that you may see a difference. Maybe not right away. Maybe it takes you longer than a week. Maybe it takes you the full three weeks. Maybe it takes you six weeks. Maybe it takes you a day. I don't know. That's going to be for you to define. But you've got to communicate. You've got to set those goals for your relationship.

So it leads us into why foreplay is so important. It gives your body the opportunity to be ready for intimacy. The more aroused you are,

especially for women, the more prepared you are to feel pleasure from penetration, whether it's with a bedroom toy, with a finger or with a partner. So the more massaging, kissing, cuddling, oral favors, self-stimulation, the use of a bedroom toy, whatever you find for you, but the more of it, the better chance you have of less pain, more lubrication, enjoying it and the greater chance of an orgasm. I'm not going to say every time you're going to have an orgasm, but the greater chance, because you're allowing your body the opportunity to respond the way that it's supposed to. You're not rushing it.

So foreplay is huge and it's the first thing we forget. It's the, "We got 10 minutes. The kids are in bed. The news is coming on or our favorite show is coming on. Let's go, let's get it done. I'm going to fulfill my obligation." We forget the lovemaking, and it can still be fun and fast and crazy and a quickie. But you've got to remember the foreplay. Foreplay can mean different things. It doesn't necessarily have to mean oral favors. It can mean leaving sexy, explicit notes in your partner's briefcase or them sending you a text message or something telling you that they're thinking about you and can't wait to get home. It's those types of things, the build-up, that helps, both physical and emotional. It will play a big role in how well you're able to respond to pleasure. So foreplay. Huge. There are lots of ways that you can engage in foreplay.

The one thing and the most important thing I hope that you take away from this is that the ability to feel pleasure by touch is always there. Our largest sex organ is our skin. It's all over. People love being touched. We love that sense of touch. It didn't go away. It's still there. It just may be different. And it's okay to try to reevaluate that. I'm going to tell you one more story, another woman that just left a fantastic spot in my heart for what she went through. Again, lost her breasts, found that her husband was a boob man, so he said. He claimed himself, "I'm a boob man." And we hear that quite frequently. And she didn't have breasts anymore, so what did that mean for their relationship? She didn't have that same type of opportunity. That's where he went to engage in intercourse. And he really struggled with the change in her body, and she really struggled with not being able to perform.

So what did that do? They stopped having sex, because that's all they knew. So we sent her home with something called Dust Me Pink, which I'm

not saying this is the only thing out there. There are tons of things that you can try, even whipped cream from your own cabinet. You can have some fun with it. But it was about them exploring. What she did was put a blindfold on her partner and then dusted trails all over her body of this edible powder, and he lipped and kissed and nibbled and spent some time and realized that as he saw her become aroused from kissing her neck or her leg or her stomach or her back that it wasn't her breasts that got him going, it was the fact that he could get her aroused that got her going. And he realized, I'm not a breast man. I'm my wife's man. Like it's everything that she represents.

So they got caught up in the lack of the one thing they thought brought them arousal, and it ceased communication. It ceased the intimacy between the two of them, and they realized, wow, we can really find pleasure together in lots of ways, and it doesn't necessarily have to come from the breasts. That's something I think is really important, that it's okay to find a new location. And you never know what it might be, and you might be surprised at wow, I really do feel pleasure from this area, and that's awesome. So challenge yourself to find something new and fun and explore your body and have your partner explore your body and know that it is possible.

So we're going to talk about lubricants, one of the most important purchases a woman can make when she's dealing with issues of dryness. They are so important. Just like you buy face cream to take care of your skin. When your elbows get dry in the winter you put something on that. Lubricants provide that same type of moisture to your vaginal tissues. It's complicated. You go to the drugstore and you see an entire shelf. You say, "How do you pick?" Then you pick one and you take it home. Either they've got a great marketing campaign or a friend told you about it or whatever. You take it home, and it doesn't work for you. That's discouraging. The reason there are so many different kinds is because we're all different and what we want and what we need is different. So I challenge you to try a couple of things. If something doesn't work for you, don't give up on it. Keep trying.

What I will tell you is if you're dealing with vaginal dryness having something that is water based and water soluble is really, really important. You can find them at your drugstore. You can find them online. You can find them at those bookstores that are out there. You can find them.



But just knowing what to look for is really important. You want water based and water soluble. The reason that's important is because it's designed to absorb into your tissue. It's designed to have a long-term benefit to help with vaginal dryness. So if that's something that you're facing, if that's something you need help with, you want a gentle, mild lubricant. If it doesn't have those two components, stop right there. It's not going to do anything for you in the long term, and you really, really need that long-term help.

There are other products, whether they be warming, or you get all of the marketing campaign behind those, if they are anything other than a water based, water soluble, they're not designed for your everyday use. Those warming lubricants: They will cause irritation. They will burn. If you use them every day like you're going to use a water-based lubricant, it will have a negative impact because they're not designed for that. So any of you who have tried that before and have been discouraged, know it's just finding a good, mild, gentle, water-based, water-soluble lubricant. It's going to be like your perfect facial moisturizer. It's going to just make your skin feel great. That's what they're intended to do. One little trick for me to tell you is if you're rubbing it in your fingers and you wipe it dry and you add a little saliva and rub it again, if it starts to get slick on your skin, it's a good one. So as you're going to your store or you're trying things out, that's a great way to kind of measure through it.

Sometimes we hear, okay, a lubricant is not enough for me. What does that mean? Some women really, really experience extreme vaginal dryness. It can happen through natural menopause or induced menopause. For women who are younger they may not necessarily need an extreme measure as this, but there are women out there who have tried every lubricant on the market and it's just not enough. There is an option. They're called vaginal moisturizers. You can find them on the market, and like I said, it's about finding what's right for you. You've got to test them. You've got to try them. If one doesn't work, don't give up on it. There are others out there. You can get them at your drugstore. You can get them online. A lot of times you can read reviews about it.

But I challenge you, don't give up on one thing. I can't tell you which one is going to work for you. You've got to be able to take on that challenge and find what's going to work. They work very similar to how you would use yeast infection medication.

You put it in at night; you allow it to absorb into your body and really do its maximum impact on your tissue. It basically is a rush of the missing fluid, the rush of the missing nutrients to that area of your body. It pairs with the lubricant. It doesn't take the place of a lubricant. It pairs with a lubricant. Use it two to three times a week. Some women will go through a six-week regimen of it and never need it again. Some women will incorporate it into their daily routine for the rest of their lives. It's about finding what works for you.

If you've got curly hair and you like to straighten it, you know what you need to do every morning to make your hair straight and you just do it. Same thing here. You've just got to fit it into your routine and make it work. If you don't, it's not going to. And overcoming vaginal dryness is a three-step process. If you find you're missing one of these steps or you don't make it a part of your schedule, you're not going to get the benefits from it. If you're not using a lubricant, if you're not using a vaginal moisturizer when you need it and you're not exercising, you're not going to see the benefits from it and you're going to struggle with vaginal dryness. I'm not saying this is going to make it perfect, but you will notice a difference and it will make it better and it can make intercourse more pleasurable. So a vaginal moisturizer is really, really important to kind of flush your system with what it's missing overnight.

Some women will notice that they have a discharge in the morning. It's just what your body didn't need. That's fine; that's normal. It happens. It just means that your body didn't need that much at that point. So just keep an eye out about what works for you and change your dosage as you go. But like I said, there are tons on the market. Find the one that works best for you.

Finally, we're going to talk about exercising, the third step into making sure you're taking care of yourself. We all know what Kegel exercises are. Yes? And we're all doing them, I hope. Kegel exercises are so, so, so, so important. Just like you take a walk every day, take care of your body. You're sleeping well; you're eating well; you're doing all of those things; you're taking care of yourself. Taking care of your vaginal tissue is equally as important. You're not exercising this area; you're not bringing blood flow. You're not bringing the missed hormones. You're not doing anything to promote healthy tissue. You're letting that area just kind of deteriorate. Another way to exercise this, if you don't want to Kegel, is to have an orgasm. If you

can have an orgasm, have one every day. Shoot, you don't have to exercise anymore. But for those of you who are struggling with having an orgasm, that's not an issue, and you're working your way up there, I recommend doing Kegels.

Imagine yourself going to the restroom, and you've got to stop, whether the phone is ringing, you hear someone knocking at the door, something is happening, you've got to stop. And you clench. And you can feel that deep clench. That is relaxing and contracting your PC muscle, your pelvic floor muscle. So think about doing that. Now, whether you do it at every stoplight and you practice doing your Kegel exercises. Maybe I'm doing it the whole time up here. Who knows, right? You don't know. You all can be doing it for the rest of the time we're here. But practice those Kegel exercises. There are tools out there to help you. We see women who say, "Okay, I feel like I'm squeezing my butt. I feel like I'm squeezing my stomach and my abs. I don't know if I'm getting the right muscle." There are tons of things out there. There are crazy little devices where you can insert and it will beep when you squeeze it hard enough. Anything you can imagine, somebody has made.

They think I'm kidding. The thing I'm going to show you, they're called Ben-Wa balls. Like I said, this isn't the only thing out there, but I just want to show you how to start getting into a routine. You lie down and insert them into your vagina, one ball. And you start flutter contractions where you're using that muscle quickly. Now, when you get tired of that, do a long hold, maybe five to 15 seconds, and then go back to the flutter hold for 15 seconds. Do this five to 15 minutes a day for like three days, lying down. I promise, it's harder than it looks. Then when you think you've got a good handle on the one ball and you can do this, no problem, and you can hold it, and you're great with this, try standing up. See if you can hold it in.

Can you walk around with it? Can you vacuum? Can you talk on the phone? Can you clean your kitchen without your ... I don't recommend going to the grocery store while you're wearing your Ben-Wa balls, because you don't want to have to explain your neighbor why a marble just came out. But when you can hold that one in, go back to the floor and try two. You're starting all over again. Put that second ball in, do those flutter holds. Do the long holds, the flutter holds, the long holds. When you feel good, try standing up. Again, harder than you think. When you can do



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this, you know that you are promoting really strong, healthy, PC muscles. You will have more bladder control. You have more control over your orgasm, the intensity, the frequency because it's that muscle contraction.

For those of you who may still be having children, that makes the birthing process easier because of being able to push with a little more oomph. It all around promotes better health. So I really, really encourage that. Not to take away from the fact that it's bringing blood flow to that area, it's making the tissue healthy. It's bringing those hormones back in, and it's helping with natural lubrication. The healthier that tissue is, the more likely it is to function like it's supposed to. So I really encourage exercising, whether you're comfortable doing it on your own or you need to go get one of those devices that beep or tell you that you've done it right. Just figure out a routine that works for you. Men can Kegel, too. The same exact function and it can give more control over ejaculation, orgasm, all of those things. So the benefits go both ways. So maybe take a challenge of doing it together. So those are Ben-Wa balls and Kegel exercising.

The last thing we're going to talk about in this realm are dilator sets. I'm going to have them pass this around so you guys can actually see what a dilator set is. Some people have never heard of them before, and that's awesome. Other people may have had their doctor tell them that they need to use it but don't know where to get it or what it is. They are devices to help stretch the vaginal walls. If penetration is something that's painful to you, you're dealing with atrophy, you're dealing with dryness, you're dealing with all of these types of issues, inserting your finger is difficult, you can't go to get your Pap smear, those types of things, if you fall into this category or you know someone that does, a lot of times a doctor will recommend a dilator set. They're hard to find. They're hard to come by. There is not a lot of information and education about them. Fortunately, we are connected with a really great group of people at Indiana University. The woman who designed this set and wrote the guide is a vulvovaginal pain specialist. She's an expert in this area, so she helped us develop a set that was not only safe for women but worked to help them overcome these issues.

So if you find that this is where you fall, I recommend taking something like this back to your healthcare provider and saying, "How do I make this work for me?" Everyone is different.

Everyone's diagnosis is going to be different; everyone's outcome is going to be different. But you work hand-in-hand with your healthcare provider to overcome these issues, and those women who struggle with painful penetration, whether it's something as small as their pinky finger, or can't even get their annual Pap, there is a way to overcome that. And so we really, really challenge you to educate yourself on things like a dilator set and educate your healthcare professional. A lot of times that's new to them, too, but there are resources available for them to help them learn about it.

If it's something that you feel like you need, that you feel like you could use and benefit from, talk to your healthcare provider and maybe even look for a pelvic floor therapist in your area. They are trained to help overcome these types of issues. They can help you find a routine that works best for you. As this goes around you'll get to see the material; you'll get to see the size range: as small as the pinky, as large as six inches. So you can find the type of penetration that is comfortable and desirable for you. There's also a guide that was written by Debbie, who's our vulvovaginal pain expert, on how to start incorporating this. But by no means do we expect you to take this home and use it without consulting your healthcare professional, because they really are going to guide you on what you need.

The last thing, the fun stuff. We're going to talk about bedroom accessories. This is something that people are afraid to talk about. Maybe I didn't need them in the past. Maybe it wasn't right for me. Maybe I was a little concerned about bringing this into my bedroom, whether it's with myself or with my partner. But we're going to talk about what's out there and that it's okay to want to add some different type of stimulation. You may be struggling with low libido. You may be struggling with having a hard time becoming aroused. Using something that can provide direct stimulation to the area of your body that you need to have that response is okay. We hope that you get some information about how to pick the right thing for you, if this is what you choose to do.

Some people may say, "I don't need this. I'm fine with the other things in my life or how to make it work or stimulating myself" or having a partner stimulate me." Other people may say, "Let's give it a shot. Let's have some fun with this. Let's shake it up a little bit. Let's try to take it up a notch." So they can really enhance arousal directly

to the area that you need it. So we're going to talk about the different types. Because I don't know about you, but any time I go to ... before I was in this industry, and I'd go to like a bookstore or go online, it's overwhelming. How do you choose? How do you pick what's right for you? How do I make this investment, have this conversation, take it home, introduce it into my bedroom and know that it works? It's scary. It's like figuring it out all over again. So we're going to talk about the things that are available.

You've got clitoral stimulators. These are designed specifically to stimulate a woman's clitoris. That's where women feel the majority of their pleasure from. Women who experience pleasure from things other than clitoral stimulation, like penetration, different positions, those types of things, whether it's with a bedroom toy or a partner's hands or fingers or a partner, it somehow is indirectly stimulating the clitoris. So we know that it comes from there for the most part. The clitoris is this little, tiny area of erectile tissue that sits externally on a woman's body. It also has little arms, legs, that branch on the inside, so there's a wider area internally that, through penetration, through different positions, women can stimulate.

So although this is the only part that sticks out, it's got kind of this wishbone internally, too, where it can sort of stimulate. And this is research that they've found in the last 15 years. We're still learning about the female body. So if you haven't gotten it all figured out now, nobody does. We're still figuring it out; we're still learning on it. So just look at this as the playground got a little bigger, learning new things. So a lot of times through penetration women will feel that. So there are toys that are designed specifically to provide that clitoral stimulation.

There are toys that are designed to be worn by a partner or a bedroom toy that a partner can penetrate with that are designed to give direct clitoral stimulation as well. So if it's something that you want to integrate in that partnered relationship, it's a possibility. They essentially are worn at the base of the penis or at the base of a bedroom toy and can be used during penetration. So it has that sort of clitoral feel that can be worn by the partner. They also can help with a male partner at providing a pleasurable sensation for them, giving some control over ejaculation and arousal. So both partners can feel some benefit from it.

Then you have products like dildos. We a lot of times get some confusion about what is a dildo



versus a vibrator. They don't vibrate. So if you're the type of person that's sensitive to vibration, you just like the penetration, you can use a toy like this, too. It's great. It's something that you can incorporate together. They come in all shapes and sizes. They come looking like penises. If you don't want it to look like a penis; you have no interest in the penis; you can find things that look like a rabbit or a dolphin or whatever it is. So you can find whatever suits your needs.

There are products called dual-action vibrators. These are the ones that you can't figure out where they go or what they do. They rotate and they spin, and they've got stuff in the shaft, and then they've got a clitoral stimulation. These are the types of products that provide vaginal stimulation, sometimes G-spot stimulation and clitoral stimulation to women. So you know you need it all or you like it all or you want to explore it all; these are the types of products. And there are trillions of them out there, so it's just about finding the one that is most unique and kind of fits what you're looking for.

Then we've got G-spot stimulators. There is lots of controversy over the G-spot, where it is, how to find it. Not all women respond to the G-spot. Not all women like penetration. Not all women like clitoral stimulation. Not all women like oral favors. It's about finding what's right for you. If you have never found your G-spot before and would like to try, I'm going to show you a picture of where you can possibly locate the G-spot. It's on the anterior wall of the vagina. A lot of women find it by inserting fingers and doing this like "Come here" motion. It can vary from the size of a small bean to a half dollar, and when it's stimulated and aroused, it can kind of feel like the texture of a rough walnut. Some women, when having this area stimulated, feel like they've got to go to the bathroom. I'm going to wet the bed.

It's because, you can see, it sits right underneath the bladder. So as you're stimulating that area, you're sending this false signal to your brain, you've got to pee. You really don't. You may be experiencing just this message. If that's concerning to you, empty your bladder before you try to explore this area of your body. Put a blanket or a towel on the bed and just go for it. Kind of get your mind in it. Some women will never get farther from that, and they will never enjoy it. That's okay. Some women will have these most intense orgasms they don't know what to do with themselves. But it responds to pressure, so the more you press on your stomach,

a partner presses on your stomach, you lay on your stomach, the more pressure, the more powerful the possibility of an orgasm is. Unlike the clitoris, you don't want all that pressure. It's about a light stimulation. So here the pressure is key.

Like I said, some women like it; some women don't. Some women will have an intense enough orgasm where they may even have a female ejaculation. And they'll say, hey, Erin, you told me I wasn't going to wet the bed, and something happened. It's a possibility. Men and women are built much the same way. Men have testicles; women have ovaries. Men have an erection when they're aroused; the clitoris is erectile tissue. It gets erect when we're aroused. We have the same functionality. Men ejaculate; women can ejaculate. Most women do it more often than they realize, but they just feel like they're naturally aroused. Some women ejaculate enough that it's noticeable. It's not going to be like in those videos that you've seen where it comes out at you or anything. But it can happen. So if that happens to you, a lot of times we hear women say, "Something is wrong with me," or they're embarrassed of it. Embrace who you are. Embrace your sexuality. Embrace what happens to you, and go with it, enjoy it. But like I said, this isn't for everyone. And it's not going to work for everyone. But if it doesn't work for you, enjoy the fact that you're exploring your body and try something different.

So to find these resources for you, you really need to evaluate you and your relationship. Understand, are you struggling with dryness? Are you struggling with no libido, you just can't get in the mood? You're like the couple earlier who just, there's all this pressure and you just can't get past the pressure? Is it painful? Are you struggling with even just being naked? Struggling with you how you look and how you feel. You've got to understand, maybe you're struggling with one of those things, maybe you're struggling with all of those things and more. But you've got to know what it is you're after. You've got to evaluate what you can do to move forward. And be open to changing those things; be open to trying new things and working to improve that. Don't be afraid to ask questions of yourself, of your partner, of your healthcare provider, of those people around you that could be a good resource. You never know what somebody might come at you with as a good suggestion to help you overcome that.

Talk to your healthcare team, seriously. They are a great resource for you. And you may find that

through the educational process together you're really learning something, and you may find that you're teaching them how to positively impact other women, and that's awesome. So use that as an awesome opportunity. Be honest. Be honest with yourself and your partner about your needs, your wants and desires. Don't promise things you can't come through with. And they shouldn't do that as well. Be honest. Set realistic goals. Set boundaries. Find things that work.

I can't stress this enough: Have fun. This is supposed to be a lot of fun. Don't put so much pressure on you guys to make it perfect. Make it fun, and that's really what should be super, super important. So I hope that you feel like you have enough information now to go out, evaluate what's going to change for you, what you can change, what you can't change and what you need to cope with and move on from and how you can make a positive move forward with feeling good about yourself, feeling good about your relationship and feeling good about what sexuality and intimacy means for you. Because it's going to be different for everybody in this room. That's awesome.

So I would love to field some questions for you if you have specific ones. I do understand the nature of this topic, it makes it hard to stand up in front of a group of people and say, "This is my issue." So if that's not something you're comfortable with, I will stay as long as I need to tonight to answer those. You can always e-mail me. You can always call me. Like I said, if I don't know the answer, we have a fantastic team of sexual health professionals, researchers, doctors, oncologists, who are there helping us get the best information for women. So if I can't find it or if I don't have it I'll make sure I find for you.

#### **WOMAN:**

This isn't a question; it's a comment. The dual-action stimulator is Charlotte's rabbit from "Sex and the City."

#### **ERIN HOSCHOUER-LAPHAM:**

Yes. So she said the dual-action stimulator is like Charlotte's rabbit from "Sex and the City," if anyone needed clarification. Yes?

#### **WOMAN:**

Can you talk about the silicone lubricants?

#### **ERIN HOSCHOUER-LAPHAM:**

I'd love to talk about silicone lubricants. The reason I didn't in the presentation is it doesn't have the initial long-term benefit like the water-based



ones do to combat dryness. If that's really your issue, if you're really struggling with dryness and painful penetration due to dryness, I don't recommend a silicone-based lubricant because it's not going to help with that moisture. For women who maybe that's not an issue, dryness is not an issue, silicone lubricants are fantastic. They don't absorb into the skin; they stay on the surface of the tissue, which makes them very, very long lasting, makes them waterproof, so you can take it in the shower. Maybe that's what you're really interested in, you want to take it in the shower, the pool, the Jacuzzi, the hot tub.

Maybe your body of water was the bathtub, have at that, too. But that makes it really good for that. It's also really good for anal play. So if you're looking to explore other areas of your body, like the rectum, which doesn't lubricate naturally, a silicone-based lubricant can really provide a long-lasting experience there as well. So it opens up a lot of areas. Within this specific presentation I wanted to talk about things that are going to impact the direct things that are affecting you, which is why I talked about water based. But that's a great question, because it is a great resource for people who want to change it up, change the location or take it in the shower.

**WOMAN:**

I had a question about the balls that you use. They look kind of small. I'm picturing that especially when you're saying laying on your back, I'm picturing like a pinball situation where they kind of go down a tube and get lost in there somewhere.

**ERIN HOSCHOUER-LAPHAM:**

You are not the only woman to think that. Let me see if I can go back to this picture. So to answer your question, you can see the vagina is a closed area. So you're not going to lose anything. It's not going to go anywhere you don't want it to go. It may just be hard to find. You hear a lot of times women say they've lost condoms or they've lost tampons and they can't get them out; they can't find them. What happens, because all of these muscles, when you get tense, what happens, you clench. You clench that body. What happens? Nothing is going to come out. I don't care what you're trying to do. It's not going to come out. It's about relaxing.

I'll pass these around so you can feel them. They're weighted. They're heavy. You're going to have a harder time holding them in than you are

worrying about them getting lost. Why I recommend going on your back is because you can really ... it helps hold them. If you want to try standing up and doing them, you're going to have them pop out all of the time. They're heavy. They're hard to hold. So this entrance of the cervix is about as small as a pencil tip. So this isn't going to fit in there. You have this closed environment. What I do tell women who are concerned, maybe they do have a condom or a tampon or a Ben-Wa ball, God forbid, stuck and they can't get it out, first off, relax. You sit on the edge of the toilet and you bear down you're like having a bowel movement. And it opens up the vagina where you can get it, use your fingers or have a partner and you can pull whatever is in there that you're freaking out about out. We hear a lot about it, especially with condoms. So don't be afraid. It's not going to go anywhere where you can't get it at it; I promise. Yes?

**WOMAN:**

I know you're not an MD, but can you speak at all to prescription things that can be used to increase libido, like the testosterone creams I've heard of. I don't know much about that whole prescription area.

**ERIN HOSCHOUER-LAPHAM:**

We don't really expose ourselves to a lot of prescriptions, just because the nature of at least the company I work for is trying to find that change for you. A lot of times, especially with low libido, it has something to do with stress. It's so much more of an emotional thing than it is a quick fix with a pill or a drug. A lot of times people find that especially in very severe cases, things like therapy, things like exercise, eating better, dieting, sleeping a good night, foreplay, communication, all have a much larger impact on increasing libido than any pill could ever do.

So our stance is really to educate on those types of things and then exhaust all of those resources before going to something like that where we don't know. We don't know the effects of it. We don't know the long-term benefits. We really don't know, and we don't know how it's going to impact each person, because we're so different, and how we respond to hormones is so different. So I can honestly say I don't know if you'd want more information. I would be happy to help you find more information about it. But we really take the stance of what are other ways that we can focus on libido. I'd be happy to share with you those, too.

**WOMAN:**

Do you know if the lubricants can be used in conjunction with Vagifem?

**ERIN HOSCHOUER-LAPHAM:**

Remind me what Vagifem is. Is that the estrogen ...

**WOMAN:**

Suppository.

**ERIN HOSCHOUER-LAPHAM:**

As far as I know, yes. But take it to your healthcare provider and just double check. The medical professionals that I've consulted with have all told me yes. But I don't know what your healthcare provider wants for you, so make sure you talk to them as well.

**MAN:**

I was at a class earlier. There is supposedly an orgasm gap between women and men. There is like a 10-minute gap how fast women reach that point to the point where men reach that point. And it's like 10 minutes. Is there something we as men can actually do besides ...

**WOMAN:**

Wait?

**MAN:**

... wait?

**ERIN HOSCHOUER-LAPHAM:**

For those of you who didn't hear him, he said that there's this gap between men and women. That's one of those things that isn't proven. There is no physiological research that says there really is a gap between men and women. We can say that from experience. More women say that it takes them longer. I think a lot of that has to do with the emotional and social burdens that women take on. You add something like cancer to it where they feel, now I'm the caretaker of my house, my children. I have a job, whether it's full-time or part-time. I'm getting treatment. I'm dealing with the change in my body image, which is such a huge thing in our society is how we change and how we look. How does that affect how we feel about ourselves?

All of those things plus the pressure to perform. So I think you being here is the first step. I think that's phenomenal. I think that the patience that you have with your partner is a sign that that's the right path. You may never orgasm at the same time. A lot of couples who aren't faced with cancer never orgasm at the same time. That's a pressure



we put on as society to have this sort of multiple orgasm. Enjoy that gap. Enjoy your time and then being able to focus on your partner fully. Embrace what that means for your relationship. Some people it may be 10 minutes; some people it may be hours or days. And that's okay.

**MAN:**

You're right. You've got the house. You've got the kids. You've got your church. You've got your job. And then cancer and then this and this. It puts a lot of pressure.

**ERIN HOSCHOUER-LAPHAM:**

Absolutely. And pressure is what can take away your libido like that. Pressure can take away your lubrication. Pressure can take away desire. Without those things, you've got nothing. So let's start on those things, on the desire, on the feeling good, on the embracing who you are and what works for your relationship, and the rest of it will come. The rest of it will find that it works for the two of you. Be okay with the gap. Embrace that gap. Be creative with it. Play games. Find times where, all right, I'm dedicating all of my energy on one partner, and this feels good. Now it's the other partner's turn, and this feels good. Just find what works for you. But it makes me a little sad when people can say, it takes 10 minutes between two. If you don't find in that there is something wrong with you, and you need to fit in it. You need to fit with what works for you guys. I think it's awesome that you're both here and educating yourselves. I hope you take those messages and find what works for you and embrace it and love it.

**WOMAN:**

Are you selling your products here today?

**ERIN HOSCHOUER-LAPHAM:**

We are selling our products. I want you to know that I'm not here to promote our products. There are lots of good products out there available. So find what works for you. If you already have something that works for you, don't change. Keep using it. I want you to make sure that you're using things that work for you.

**WOMAN:**

Just a quick question on what's your experience been with people who have had chemotherapy in the past and they're done with treatment? I've heard from other survivors that after about four or five years their natural lubricant does start to come back quite a bit, even if they haven't used the other things. Has that been your experience?

**ERIN HOSCHOUER-LAPHAM:**

It has varied for me as to women who say their lubrication comes back. I will say that age plays a factor, just because of the normal process your body goes through in menopause around age 50, typically for women. So if you're younger, if you find that you're in your 20s and 30s, just like with fertility, there is always the option that it will be there, that your body will right itself. Because your body is a really fantastic thing where it has this ability to take care of itself and fix those things and regrow organs and all of this crazy stuff. So there is that possibility. It may be for some women that just keeping the health of that area, whether it's check-ups, whether it's exercising, is enough. They never have to use a lubricant. But for those people who find that for right now they need a lubricant, maybe they'll never have to use it again in five years and they will be too wet and that becomes an issue. Whatever. It happens. But there is always that possibility.

**WOMAN:**

Can you speak about antidepressants -- I'm sure a lot of people in this room are on them -- and the inability to reach orgasm on them?

**ERIN HOSCHOUER-LAPHAM:**

Absolutely. Antidepressants have some really fantastic qualities at helping overcome what happens in stressful situations and your ability as a person to cope with that, whether it's chemical, whether it's whatever. But they also have some really nasty side effects: low libido, lack of arousal, lack of the same physiological response, lack of lubrication. All of those things can be a major hurdle. I am not saying it's easy to overcome them, but it is possible. I think the same messages apply. I think the first and foremost thing that is really, really important is foreplay.

For some women on antidepressants or anti-anxiety types of medications, it may increase to you need an hour of foreplay before your body is really ready to respond. You may find that half of the time you're able to have an orgasm or a quarter of the time. But your body can do it. It is a possibility. It's just how willing you are to put the time and energy into making that work for you. Because it is a very intense medication. And so it does a lot to your body to help, but it does a lot to suppress things, too. It does a lot to bring that libido way down and those hormones way down. So you've got to be willing to work at it. And if you are and you have fun with it and you take that pressure off to orgasm, you may find that it gets easier, too.

**WOMAN:**

I know that I had that from a certain antidepressant, and I changed to another antidepressant, and it didn't have that effect.

**ERIN HOSCHOUER-LAPHAM:**

That's awesome.

**WOMAN:**

Different things work for different people differently.

**ERIN HOSCHOUER-LAPHAM:**

That's a great point. She said there is always the possibility that the antidepressant you're on, you can change. The same thing happens with women and birth control. They notice some side effects, and changing the type of birth control may change the side effect. So that may be an option. Always talk to your healthcare provider. That's why communication to them is so important. Hey, I don't like what's going on with me. I don't have to live with this. What can you do to help me overcome that? So that's a great point. Thank you.

**WOMAN:**

Does hormone therapy play a role as far as reaching orgasms?

**ERIN HOSCHOUER-LAPHAM:**

That's a hard question to answer, because hormones are so unique to every person. I would recommend talking to your healthcare provider. If hormone therapy is something that you're interested in and you want to know specifically how it may impact you, they are the best resource for you, because they are the only person, besides you, that knows the ins and outs of what you've been through, what's working for you, what's not working for you and what options are available for you. I know some people find hormone therapy to be very successful, and I know some people absolutely want nothing to do with it. So it's about finding the thing that's right for you. I have heard less about it having a negative impact, but again, check with your healthcare provider about what it's going to do for you.

**WOMAN:**

This is having to do with the doctors recommending like an estrogen cream for atrophy and not wanting to go there at all. So along with the vaginal dryness and atrophy, what do you recommend?



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**ERIN HOSCHOUER-LAPHAM:**

I think if you don't want to go there, don't go there. Because if you don't feel good about it, you're never going to be able to take the next steps. There are resources. There are things that you can do. The three main things I say make a part of your routine religiously are a lubricant, and a good one; a vaginal moisturizer, and a good one; and exercising. It's just like you've got to diet, you've got to exercise, and you've got to sleep well. If you don't do one of those things, it's not going to have a healthy impact. You diet and exercise and you sleep three hours a night, your body is still not going to function the way you want it to. So I recommend those three things as really important. If you don't want hormone therapy, that's not what's right for you, you've got to take it upon yourself to make it a part of your routine to take care of that area of your body.

**LINDSAY AVNER:**

Are there any other questions? Erin and her team are going to be here the rest of the time. I just wanted everyone to give her a round of applause for a great presentation.

**ERIN HOSCHOUER-LAPHAM:**

Thank you. This is probably the most wonderful experience I have every year, so I look forward to seeing you every year.  
[END OF TRANSCRIPT]