

Is there Sex after Prostate Cancer? By Ralph Alterowitz

Recently, a Long Island reader wrote to Ann Landers about her husband's impotence. She was upset that he wouldn't try a penile implant. He said it wasn't natural.

Ann Landers printed a response from a man who had had an implant and it was great. He wrote that the "implant is so natural, her husband won't know he has it until he needs it."

What is Impotence?

Impotence is a man's inability to get or maintain an erection that is sufficient to have intercourse. Implants are one of many therapies available to people who suffer from impotence, a common side effect of prostate cancer treatment.

What is a Penile Implant?

Simply put, it is a surgically implanted mechanical device that enables a man to have an erection when he wants. Implants were more widely recommended before the introduction of injections and medications such as Viagra. But many men still elect to have this procedure when medications are not effective or can't be tolerated.

The first known penile-implant surgery occurred in 1936. The next major improvement came in 1960 with rigid rods, which gave way to the semi rigid or malleable rods developed in 1972. A year later, a soft inflatable prosthesis, which looks most natural, was invented by a doctor at Baylor University.

In his book *Impotence*, Dr. W. Lloyd Glover, wrote, "Today penile implantation is a very safe procedure and prostheses are relatively complication-free. We are experiencing a five-year success rate of 86 percent for all types of prostheses combined."

As indicated by Dr. Glover having an implant is not risk-free. Surgery is required, and there is a risk that the device may fail. Yet all impotence therapies have some risk.

This brings me to the last line in the Ann Landers letter, "If he truly loves his wife, he will do what he can to enrich their life together." With his partner, a man should explore what is available to meet his and his partner's needs. An implant is only one possible solution. Today's list of options includes pumps, oral medications, intraurethral medication, and penile injections. Tomorrow's list will include penile creams and gels as well as new orals and medications.

As Ann Landers wrote "There are many methods of treating erectile dysfunction, and each man must find what works best for him."

Ralph Alterowitz is coauthor with his wife Barbara Alterowitz of *The Lovin' Ain't Over: The Couple's Guide to Better Sex after Prostate Disease*.

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