

Holistic Health



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## Sex, Drugs & Rock-n- Roll

by Kathleen O'Keefe Kanavos

"C'MON, BABY, LIGHT MY FIRE.  
TRY TO SET THE NIGHT ON FIRE."

Jim Morrison (1943-1971)

Have you ever wondered if sex will ever be enjoyable again during or after cancer treatment? Following an experience with painful sex, the fear of intercourse can become a self-fulfilling prophecy. It takes courage to explore an area that has been taboo in our culture for so long: the act and the art of lovemaking.

Hormones stimulate sex, as do healthy energy levels followed by a feeling of physical pride. But it's difficult to feel sexy with little or no hair, minimally brushed teeth, exhaustion, missing body parts and all the other unattractive things that accompany cancer therapy.

Sex may be 90% mental, but the 10% that is physical can often be painfully difficult when chemotherapy has dehydrated vaginal tissue and reduced its elasticity. Things just don't "slip-n-slide" the way they used to. There may also be a loss of libido due to the chemicals necessary to defeat hormone-receptive cancer, treatment fatigue and deflated "self image."

Our sexuality is a big part of who we are. As our bodies change from illness and treatment, physiological changes occur that can alter the way we feel about and respond to sex. During the best of times, men and women relate differently to sex. During treatment, we can appear to be from different universes.

In her book, *The Sexy Years*, Ageless, Susanne Somers described the "seven dwarfs of menopause" as Itchy, Bitchy, Sweaty, Sleepy, Bloated, Forgetful and All-Dried-Up. Yeah, I've met them! When I explained my sexual difficulty to my gynecologist, he prescribed a vaginal pill called Vagi-fem, an organ-specific hormone therapy. Since my tumor was HR+ (estrogen hormone receptive), I called my oncologist to verify that it would not interfere with my treatment as some hormones can actually stimulate hormone receptive cancers. He confirmed that Vagi-fem was safe for me to take.

My doctor also suggested I try the Estring, a vaginal insert that releases low doses of estrogen to thicken the vaginal walls and increase lubrication.

I discontinued the Vagi-fems because my concern about hormone pills negatively affected my state of mind, another important part of love-making. K-Y jelly simply didn't do the job. I needed professional help. My solution was a trip to a sex shop in Provincetown.

The shop I had in mind was on Commercial Street, next



Provincetown Rooftops, Oil on canvas, By Kathryn Kleekamp

"Do you want water-proof, long lasting, water soluble or flavored?"

Is this a trick question? I wondered.

"The best lubricants on the market are made in Germany," she continued and reached for a small black phallic-shaped bottle from the collection I was cradling in my arms.

Leave it to the Germans to keep engines running smoother and longer, I thought.

"Body Action Xtreme stays slippery for quite some time, even under water, and it won't interfere with condoms."

"Interfere with condoms?" I repeated. I remembered Dr. Barkley advising me to use condoms while on chemo because of the possibility of getting pregnant. I wonder how many baby boomers were conceived with incompatible lubricants?

"Non-latex-compatible lubricants will dissolve condoms," she explained. "Some lubricants are flavored, but again, those are usually water soluble. Then there is the warming formula that heats up with friction." She pointed to another suggestive skinny bottle in my hand.

That's the last thing in the world that I need! With such a tight space to work in, things tended to heat up naturally, without any extra help. I don't want to burn down the bedroom. I just want to have normal sex again.

"The bottom line is you get what you pay for," she said, helping me replace the bottles to their shelves, starting with the one that heated up. "Unless it has flavoring, which adds to the price, water-based products are cheaper than silicone formulas. But, the best way to decide is to feel the difference."

With a sly smile, she leaned toward me and opened a bottle. Gently taking my hand, she poured a drop of the water-based product on my palm and the silicon

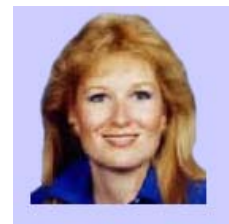
This article is excerpted from appendix II of Kathleen O'Keefe-Kanavos's manuscript:

### SURVIVING CANCERLAND: THE PSYCHIC ASPECTS OF HEALING

Yoga practices & meditation are another method of dealing with sexual challenges.

These practices bring your full awareness into your body, breath, movement and voice. One such Sexual Yoga is Tantra Yoga, the Yoga of Sacred Sexuality  
[www.TantraT.com](http://www.TantraT.com)

This practices the acceptance of all parts of ourselves & connects sex with spirit. If you take care of your spirit, it will take care of you!



Kathleen O'Keefe-Kanavos is a two-time, ten-year breast cancer survivor. She lives on Cape Cod with her husband of 25 years and their cats.

A retired special education teacher, Kathy also taught psychology at the University of South Florida, and is a Reiki master.

For seven years, Kathy has been a phone counselor to women throughout the country & seven foreign countries for the R. A. Bloch Cancer Foundation.

R. A. Bloch Cancer Foundation  
[www.blochcancer.org](http://www.blochcancer.org) or email  
[hotline@hrblock.com](mailto:hotline@hrblock.com)

She is also a mentor for WE CAN  
[www.wecancercenter.org](http://www.wecancercenter.org).

She has penned a book, *Surviving Cancerland: A Memoir on the Psychic Aspects of Healing*, and was recently signed with New York literary agent Jack Scovill to find a publisher for her work.

to Spank The Monkey, with its life-size wall painting of a man spanking the bare bottom of a large hairy monkey. I grabbed my husband, Peter, by the hand and headed for the door of the sex shop.

Once inside, I lowered my head to hide my flushed face and pushed my way down the narrow aisles filled with leather clothing and whips. I followed the signs pointing to the second floor's XXX shop and prayed I'd immediately find what I needed, pay for it, and leave without having to converse or make eye contact with anyone.

Fortunately, the second floor was so crowded no one took any notice of Peter and me. I soon spied two middle-aged women holding packaged electric sex toys. They huddled with a sales girl and questioned the contraptions' performance as though they were comparing electric egg beaters. One woman asked which one performed better on what speed. The sight of my gaping mouth must have interrupted her because she stopped talking and smiled at me.

I scurried past them and into a display of lubricants, knocking bottles and jars to the floor. To my horror, people stared as I knelt to retrieve a long flesh colored phallic-shaped bottle. I grabbed for the many smaller, pastel colored versions that danced around the floor like sugar plum fairies.

"May I help you?" a soft voice asked.

"Well, you see, I have this little problem and I didn't know where else to go for help..." I stammered in a choked whisper. I proceeded to let it all come tumbling out. The only things missing were the couch and Dr. Freud.

I couldn't believe I was telling this stranger my most personal thoughts, challenges, and emotions pertaining to sex.

I couldn't believe I was telling this stranger my most personal thoughts, challenges, and emotions pertaining to sex. To my surprise, not only was she a great listener, but, for the next fifteen minutes, she educated me on the finer points of lubricants.

based on the back of my hand, and proceeded to rub them briskly. "There, now, feel the difference?"

There was a difference! The silicon was smooth as silk. I looked around to show Peter, but he was nowhere in sight.

"You don't know how much you've helped me," I told her. "I was so nervous. Thank you."

"Oh, no problem," she answered with a wave of her hand and was instantly joined by another woman who'd obviously been listening from a safe distance.

When I headed for the stairs with my little bag of goodies, Peter miraculously popped out from behind a bookshelf. "So? What did you get?"

"Oh, just the very best lubricant which, by the way, is made by the Germans. And a toy."

"A toy? What kind of toy? Let me see," he said and reached for the non-descript bag in my hand.

"I'll show you when we get home. Now that we've got some good "engine oil," let's find a great Rock & Roll CD for later tonight."

After exploring these avenues in my quest for enjoyable sex, I have chosen yoga, meditation, and lubrication as my "method of choice."

However, I've found the ultimate aphrodisiac is having a good looking 'hunk' next to me in bed who thinks that despite everything, I'm still desirable and beautiful, and who wants to love me "till the cows come home." That makes me feel sexy. I call that "hunk" Peter, my significant other, husband, best friend and lover.

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The Pink Pages of her book have been added to the R.A. BLOCK CANCER FOUNDATION reference booklet.

Kathy was featured in the Barnstable Patriot Newspaper and interviewed in January, 2009, for the PROFILE program of TV Channel 17.

**But what if we can't or won't go into a sex shop?" one girlfriend exclaimed after hearing my story. I've since discovered some pharmacies carry lubricants other than K-Y jelly.**

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[www.StaysWetLonger.com](http://www.StaysWetLonger.com)  
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