

Listening to Libido

A LIBIDO JOURNAL
for patients

A slow,
honest
reawakening



Cancer and Intimacy.com

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Welcome & Introduction

What Is a Libido Journal?

A libido journal is a loving, nonjudgmental space where you can explore your inner world of desire—whatever that looks like right now. ***It's not about fixing, forcing, or performing.*** It's about listening. It's about curiosity. It's about slowing down enough to say: "How do I feel about intimacy today? What feels alive? What feels distant? What am I longing for?"

When people hear the word "libido," they often think of sex drive—a kind of on/off switch that's either working or broken.

A narrow definition of libido can make us feel like our worth is tied to how often we want sex, how we perform, or whether we're meeting some invisible standard.

But your libido is not a test. It's not a number. It's not a diagnosis. And it's not a contest.

In this journal, we take back the word libido. We soften it. We reclaim it as something bigger and more soulful.

Here, libido is understood as your life energy—your desire not just for sex, but for pleasure, connection, touch, expression, intimacy, creativity, and even stillness.

Take that in!

It's the spark that says, I want to feel something. I want to be close to something. I want to be known—by myself or another.

Especially after illness, trauma, or medical interventions like cancer treatment, libido can feel unpredictable or absent altogether.

You may feel out of sync with your body. You may not recognize your desires anymore—or you might not feel any desire at all. You might feel grief for how things used to be, or frustration with how slowly healing is unfolding.

And in all of this, you might be wondering, Is this normal? Am I okay? Will I ever feel like myself again?

A libido journal doesn't promise answers to every question. What it offers instead is companionship. ***It gives you a private, pressure-free space to write honestly*** about your experiences, your sensations, your questions, your longings, your numbness, your fears, and your hopes.

This is not a worksheet to complete. It's a relationship to tend.

Think of this journal as a gentle invitation to sit beside your own desire, however it shows up. To track its moods and its mysteries, noticing what draws you in and what pulls you away.

Especially during or after cancer, desire is not just physical. It's interwoven with identity, body image, boundaries, fatigue, medication, medical trauma, hormone shifts, scars (seen and unseen), and relationship changes.

Over time, you might begin to notice patterns: moments of increased openness, subtle shifts in body sensation, small pleasures that stir something unexpected. You might realize that your libido is still very much alive—just quieter, wiser, or in need of a new language.

For some, this journal becomes a map. For others, it's a mirror. And for many, it's a container for grief, celebration, discovery, and healing.

You may use these pages to reflect on past experiences, to dream into the future, or to simply name what's real right now. You may write about sensuality without ever writing about sex. You may write about absence, numbness, or pain—and that counts just as much as writing about pleasure.

That's why this journal doesn't come with a goalpost. There is no right way to experience libido. There is only your way. Your pace. Your unfolding.

In a world that often rushes us toward performance, recovery, or answers, this Libido Journal offers something quieter, more radical: permission.

Permission to be in process.

Permission to not know.

Permission to desire in new ways—or not at all.

Permission to treat your libido like a garden, not a machine.

So if you're here, it means you're already listening. You're already tending. You're already brave.

Welcome to your journal!

Why Journal About Libido?

Because desire can be hard to talk about—and even harder to feel safe being curious about—especially after an illness, medical trauma, or big life change. ***Journaling gives you a private, pressure-free way to explore your feelings, experiences, and sensations around sex, intimacy, touch, and identity.***

For those healing from cancer, libido may feel like it has disappeared, changed, or become complicated. Pain, medication, fatigue, surgeries, grief, and body changes all play a role in how we experience desire. And while many people talk about “getting back to normal,” this journal invites you into something more real, more compassionate: ***getting to know yourself now.***

Through this journal, you may uncover subtle moments of pleasure. You may meet parts of yourself that are tender or dormant. You may realize that your definition of intimacy has shifted all together. Desire isn’t one-size-fits-all. And your journey is valid, wherever you are on it.

Who This Journal Is For

This journal is for anyone navigating changes in libido, intimacy, or sexual expression—especially those whose lives have been touched by cancer, directly or indirectly.

You might be:

- Currently in treatment and feeling disconnected from your body
- Feeling grief over the way things used to be
- Exploring new relationships or redefining an old one
- Craving more connection to yourself, but not sure where to start
- Ready to rekindle your sense of eroticism—but on your terms
- Feeling numb, unsure, or frustrated with a libido that seems to have vanished

This journal holds space for all of that.

You do not need to identify as a sexual person, be in a relationship, or have any particular experience to benefit from this process. You don’t need to “want sex” or even know what you want. You just need to be curious, open to noticing, and willing to show up for yourself with tenderness.

How to Use This Resource

There is no wrong way to use this Libido Journal. These pages are here to serve you, not the other way around. You are welcome to write daily, weekly, or only when you feel moved. You can skip around. You can use a pencil, a digital document, voice notes, or a favorite pen and journal. You can even draw, doodle, or record videos if that feels more natural.

Each section includes:

- Gentle guidance and reflections on different aspects of libido and intimacy
- Journal prompts to help you explore your inner landscape
- Optional practices and “experiments” to deepen awareness and connection
- Check-in templates to track energy, sensation, desire, or emotion over time

There’s no expectation of outcomes here. You’re not being graded. You’re not “behind.” If a prompt or certain section doesn’t resonate, feel free to skip it. If it opens something unexpected, give yourself time. This is a non-linear, personal process. Be as honest and unfiltered as you like.

And if you take long breaks? That’s okay too. Libido is often quiet before it speaks. It may whisper, retreat, emerge suddenly, or surprise you.

All of it, just like all of you, is welcome.

Suggested Pace & Mindset

Think of this journal as a slow walk through a garden—not a race or a task list. You don't need to “fix” your libido or rush into desire. Instead, invite yourself to notice. Notice what sensations arise. Notice when you want to pull back. Notice what you feel, and also what you don't.

Some suggestions:

- Start with one entry or section per week
- Choose a regular time that feels calm—maybe after a bath, a walk, or while sipping tea
- Create a soothing space: cozy lighting, your favorite playlist, a comforting scent
- Let yourself respond to prompts intuitively—there are no right answers
- Keep this journal private unless you want to share
- Be tender with yourself. If grief comes up, that's okay. If nothing comes up, that's okay too.

Your libido isn't broken. It may simply be in hiding. It may be shape-shifting. Or it may be growing roots underground, preparing to bloom in its own season.

This journal is an invitation to listen, gently.

Let's begin.

I'm so happy you're here!

Chapter 1:

Libido as Life Energy, Not a Performance Metric

Let's start by expanding the definition of libido.

It's not just about sex. It's not just about wanting someone or being wanted. And it's definitely not about how often you do it or whether your body "works" in a certain way.

Libido, at its essence, is life energy. It's the inner spark that draws you toward vitality, connection, and sensation. It might show up as a longing to be touched, to feel closeness, to play, to explore. Or it might show up as a desire to move your body, create something beautiful, or rest in a moment of deep presence.

When we strip away the cultural pressure to measure desire like a performance—how often, how much, how intense—we make room for a more truthful and personal understanding. One that honors your body's rhythms, your soul's longings, and your real-life circumstances.

You don't need to feel "in the mood" all the time to have a healthy libido. You don't need to want sex to be connected to your sensuality. And you definitely don't need to compare yourself to who you were before illness, trauma, or life changes.

Your libido is not broken if it's quiet.

It's not gone if it feels different.

It's not failing if it doesn't look like what the world tells you it should.

Instead of asking, "What's wrong with my sex drive?", you might begin asking instead, "What is my body trying to say?" or "What does desire mean to me now?"

This is the heart of what this journal is about: learning to listen inwardly, without pressure or judgment. Reframing libido as something that evolves, softens, pulses, and renews—on your timeline.

Activity

Prompt 1: Reframing Libido

In what ways have I been taught to think about libido?

How do those beliefs make me feel about myself?

What would it feel like to think of libido as my life energy—not a score or a signal that something is wrong?

Prompt 2: Energy Mapping

-List five things that make you feel alive, even a little. (They don't have to be sexual.)

-Circle any that feel connected to desire, vitality, or warmth in the body.

-How might you invite or bring more of these into your life—even briefly or gently?

Common Libido Changes During

There's no one-size-fits-all experience when it comes to libido and cancer. But many people report changes—sometimes drastic ones—during treatment.

These changes can be physical:

- Hormonal shifts that decrease desire
- Pain during sex
- Vaginal dryness, erectile difficulties, or nerve changes
- Scars or altered sensation
- Changes in energy levels or stamina

They can also be emotional:

- Feeling disconnected from your body
- Grieving your former sense of self or sexuality
- Grieving the way your intimacy with a partner has changed or the way a relationship felt
- Navigating identity changes
- Worrying about how a partner perceives you (or if you'll ever have a partner again)
- Dealing with fear—of rejection, pain, or recurrence

And they can be relational:

- Communication difficulties with a partner
- Mismatched libidos
- Feeling pressure to return to “normal” intimacy
- Loss of a relationship during or after treatment

None of these changes mean something is wrong with you. They mean your body—and your whole system—has been through a major event.

Sometimes, libido takes a back seat while survival is the priority. Sometimes, people feel a surge of desire after facing mortality. And sometimes, desire flickers quietly, asking for slowness and care.

Wherever you fall on the spectrum, it's okay. You don't need to rush back into anything. You don't need to reclaim desire in the same way you knew it before. You're allowed to build something entirely new—based on truth, gentleness, and your current reality. This journal can help you chart that new path, step by step.

Activity

Prompt 1: Naming the Changes

-What are the biggest changes I've noticed in my libido, intimacy, or sense of touch since my diagnosis or treatment?

-Which changes are frustrating, sad, or confusing? Which changes might actually be neutral—or even positive?

Prompt 2: Permission to Be Different

-If I gave myself full permission to not go back to “how things were,” what could open up instead?

-What might new expressions of intimacy or desire look like for this version of me?

Grief, Fatigue, Fear, and Body Image: The Often-Invisible Players

When we talk about libido, we often focus on hormones or physical function. But desire is far more complex—and often shaped by silent, emotional forces.

Grief might be lingering, unspoken. You may be grieving the version of yourself before cancer. Or grieving touch that used to feel good but doesn't anymore. You might be grieving innocence, ease, confidence, or a relationship that didn't survive the storm.

Fatigue is also real—not just physical, but emotional and existential. The exhaustion of appointments, recovery, medical decisions, and fear can dull even the brightest sensual sparks. When you're drained, pleasure can feel far away, or even irrelevant.

Fear shows up in many forms: fear of pain, rejection, awkwardness, or being seen in a changed body. Fear of getting close. Fear of not getting close.

Body image is another deep and tender terrain. You may feel alienated from your body. You may not want to look in the mirror. You may feel unsure about being touched—or not know how you want to be touched. These feelings don't just live in the mind; they live in the skin, the belly, the nervous system.

These invisible players affect libido—often more than anything hormonal ever could.

That's why we approach libido gently here. That's why your journal welcomes tears, silence, anger, uncertainty, and longing. You don't have to override these feelings to "get your desire back." You're allowed to feel them, name them, and hold space for what's underneath.

In doing so, you might find that desire isn't gone. It's just buried under the weight of what hasn't been spoken yet.

Activity

Prompt 1: A Letter to My Body

- Write a short letter to your body. Let yourself be honest.
- You might express gratitude, grief, anger, confusion, or love.
- Then read it back to yourself with kindness, as if it were written by someone you care for deeply.

[illegible]

Prompt 2: Naming the Invisible

-What unspoken feelings (grief, fear, shame, fatigue, etc.) might be shaping my current relationship with desire?

-If I let those feelings be fully seen and acknowledged, how might that shift the pressure I've been carrying?

[illegible]

Rewriting the Story of Desire on Your Terms

Desire doesn't have to look how it used to. And it doesn't have to look how anyone else says it should.

One of the most liberating things you can do after cancer—or any major transformation—is to rewrite your story of what desire means. This might include sex, but it might also include things like comfort, connection, curiosity, or aliveness. It might be soft. It might be wild. It might be slow. It might be quiet.

It might not be “sexual” at all, but still deeply erotic.

Desire doesn't need to come with pressure or obligation. It can be about reclaiming your right to want anything—to want to be seen, touched, held, or even left alone. To want beauty, solitude, nature, sensation. To want truth.

This section of the journal will help you explore your new definitions. Not the ones handed to you. Not the ones expected of you. The ones that resonate now.

You might begin to ask:

- What turns me toward life?
- What kinds of touch feel safe or interesting right now?
- What would I love to feel—even if I'm not sure how to get there yet?
- What version of intimacy would support me at this stage of healing?

Rewriting your desire story is a form of self-respect. It's a reclamation of autonomy. It's the decision to move forward not by replicating what was, but by honoring what is.

And what is—in all its messy, sacred truth—is already enough.

Activity

Prompt 1: Desire, Redefined

Finish these sentences:

Desire, to me, means...

I feel desire when...

I want to reclaim or reimagine desire by...

Prompt 2: Intimacy Menu (Expanded)

Make three lists:

“Yes, please”: things that feel good or intriguing right now

“Maybe later”: things you’re unsure about but open to revisiting

“Not right now”: things that feel overwhelming, off-limits, or disconnected from your truth

Chapter 2:

The Landscape of Your Desire

A Nonjudgmental Self-Inventory

Before we can reconnect with desire—or even begin to understand what we want—we have to create space to *notice*. Not to analyze, critique, or fix. Just... notice.

This chapter is an invitation to pause, turn inward, and begin the process of gentle self-observation. No expectations. No pressure to be or feel a certain way. Just honest noticing of what's present in your internal landscape.

This is your **desire terrain**—the wide and varied ecosystem inside you where feelings, sensations, stories, and energies move and mingle. Like any landscape, it shifts. Some areas may feel familiar, alive, and fertile. Others may feel quiet, distant, uncertain, or even inaccessible.

Doing a self-inventory doesn't mean evaluating yourself. It means **meeting yourself**. Getting reacquainted with the signals and silences that live in your body, your emotions, your memories, and your spirit.

Here, you're invited to begin noticing:

- When and where you feel open—or closed
- What sensations arise naturally, and what sensations feel far away
- What kinds of energy feel available to you—and which feel limited or lost
- How aliveness shows up in your day, even if not directly connected to libido

This is not about figuring everything out. It's about opening a door and sitting in the doorway with curiosity.

When Do I Feel Most Alive? Most Tender? Most Disconnected?

Instead of asking, “Do I feel desire right now?”—which can sometimes provoke stress, shame, or disappointment—we widen the lens. We begin by exploring the *edges* of desire. The emotional and sensory states that surround it.

These three questions—**When do I feel most alive? Most tender? Most disconnected?**—become gentle portals into your erotic truth.

When do I feel most alive?

Start here. Aliveness is often the spark behind desire—it doesn’t have to be sexual to be important.

You might feel most alive:

- Watching sunlight dance across a wall
- Moving your body freely, without agenda
- Laughing with someone you trust
- Reading something that stirs you
- Crying honestly, with relief

When do you feel most alive?

These moments of vitality matter. They show you where your system opens, where your energy begins to rise. Sometimes, desire follows. Sometimes it doesn’t. But *aliveness* is always worth noticing.

When do I feel most tender?

Tenderness is a powerful signal. It's where vulnerability and openness meet. It's often the place we begin to feel again—especially after numbness, grief, or shutdown.

You might feel most tender:

- Listening to music that touches you
- Talking about something that matters
- Looking at old photographs
- Feeling grief rise in your chest
- Being seen, even when you're not "okay"

When do you feel most tender?

Tenderness isn't weakness. It's *a doorway*. It tells you that your body and heart are responding. That something sacred is stirring.

When do I feel most disconnected?

This is not a bad question—it's a brave one.

Disconnection might show up as:

- Numbness or fatigue
- Emotional shutdown
- Avoidance of touch or intimacy
- Being in your head, far from your body
- Not knowing what you want—or feeling like you want nothing

When do you feel most disconnected?

Disconnection isn't a flaw. It's **information**. It often tells you what's not working, what feels unsafe, or what's asking for protection. Naming it gently helps you tend to it, rather than being ruled by it.

Together, these three questions become a kind of map. They show you where desire lives, where it might be sleeping, and where it's slowly making its way back to you.

Libido and the Senses: Exploring Sensory Input and Pleasure

Before desire becomes arousal or longing, it often begins as a **sensory experience** that is felt or noticed. A smell. A texture. A sound. A temperature change on the skin.

Sometimes desire is loud and unmistakable. But more often—especially during illness or trauma—it is quiet. Subtle. Sensory.

You might feel a flicker of interest not in sex, but in:

- The smell of clean laundry
- The taste of citrus on your tongue
- The sound of a favorite voice
- The feeling of lotion on your hands
- The softness of socks, or the coolness of sheets

These are not trivial. These are *entry points*.

When we allow ourselves to explore **sensation without pressure**, we begin to reawaken our sensual body—the part of us that's attuned to pleasure, comfort, curiosity, and beauty.

Right now, try asking yourself:

What sensations feel good or interesting today?

What am I craving—warmth, softness, texture, stillness?

What do I want to avoid right now? Why?

Over time, this builds **sensory trust**. It lets your body know that pleasure is safe. That sensation can be interesting, even when it doesn't lead to anything else.

This is how desire can become accessible again—not with fireworks, but with a shiver, a sigh, a smile.

Energy Mapping: How Different Types of Energy Show Up for You

Desire doesn't only live in the genitals or the imagination. It moves through the **energetic system** of your whole being—your body, your heart, your senses, and your relationships.

Some days, your body might have energy, but your emotions are heavy. Some days, you're emotionally open but physically fatigued. Some days, everything feels blocked.

Learning how your energy shifts across different days, times and dimensions can help you better understand what supports desire—and what inhibits it.

Physical Energy

How rested do I feel today?

Do I want to move or stay still?

Do I have the physical capacity to feel, to engage, or to be touched?

Emotional Energy

Am I emotionally available or withdrawn?

Am I feeling grounded, sensitive, volatile, content, anxious?

What emotions are loudest in my body today?

Sensual Energy

Do I feel drawn to sensory pleasure or overwhelmed by it?

What textures, sounds, scents feel good—or don't?

Can I enjoy sensation without turning it into sexual activity?

Relational Energy

Do I want connection or solitude today?

If partnered, do I feel emotionally close, tense, or distant?

Do I feel seen, respected, and safe in my relationships?

Tracking these energies, even informally, gives you data. It helps you spot patterns like:

- You feel more open to touch after a nap
- You shut down after stressful appointments
- Sensuality blooms after time in nature
- Emotional safety opens the door to physical intimacy

This insight helps you respond more compassionately to your own rhythms—and helps you advocate for your needs with more clarity and self-trust.

Closing Reflections

Your desire isn't just an urge—it's an ecosystem. It's made of emotions, memories, sensations, thoughts, instincts, and deep truths.

It doesn't have to be loud to be real. It doesn't have to be sexual to matter.

This chapter isn't about diagnosing or fixing anything. It's about getting to know your inner terrain—where you feel ease, where you feel tension, where you want to plant something new.

You may find areas of lush growth. You may find dry ground. You may find seeds.

Tend to all of it.

Your erotic life doesn't start with answers.

It starts with listening.

Chapter 3:

Cycles, Seasons & Sensations

Libido Isn't Linear: Making Peace with Ebbs and Flows

One of the most loving things you can offer yourself on the journey of reclaiming intimacy is the understanding that ***libido isn't linear***.

It doesn't move in a straight line. It doesn't follow a schedule. It doesn't behave the same way every day, every week, or every season.

Desire is cyclical. Rhythmic. Mysterious. Responsive.

And especially in the wake of illness, trauma, hormonal shifts, or emotional upheaval—it can change, retreat, resurface, evolve.

You may find yourself asking:

- *Why did I feel desire yesterday but not today?*
- *Why did this touch feel amazing last week but not now?*
- *Why do I want closeness sometimes, and space other times?*

The answer is simple and often overlooked: ***because you're human***.

Desire, like the moon or the tide or the body itself, moves through cycles. It rises and falls. It has seasons of blooming, dormancy, subtle stirring, and surprising reawakening.

This chapter is about *making peace* with those rhythms—especially if they feel inconsistent or unfamiliar. It's about trading in the myth of the “steady sex drive” for the much more truthful, compassionate practice of noticing what changes—and honoring it.

You are not broken if your libido has slowed.

You are not failing if you crave closeness one day and not the next.

You are simply in rhythm. Even if it's a rhythm you're still learning to hear.

Tracking Patterns: Hormones, Treatments, Emotions, and Energy

Whether or not you menstruate. Whether or not you're on hormones. Whether or not you're in active treatment. Your body still *cycles*.

Your emotional body cycles. Your nervous system cycles. Your desire cycles.

By tracking your experience over time, you begin to learn the unique rhythm of your own system. Not so you can predict or control it—but so you can **meet it with more compassion**.

There may be patterns shaped by:

- Medication side effects
- Hormonal changes
- Stress and sleep
- Connection or conflict in your relationships
- Your spiritual or emotional seasons
- The weather, the moon, your environment

This is not about rigid tracking. It's about gathering information, slowly and kindly, so you can make sense of what feels chaotic or confusing. Think of it as ***building a map*** of your current erotic ecology.

Over time, you may notice:

- You feel more open after movement or solitude
- Your body feels less accessible around medical appointments
- Your desire dips during certain medications or phases of treatment
- Certain foods, smells, or sensations soften or heighten your response

This is useful knowledge. Not to make you more productive. But to make you ***more attuned***.

Daily Check-Ins: Mood, Desire, Touch Tolerance, Energy

A short daily check-in with yourself is one of the most grounding and empowering practices you can begin. It only takes a few minutes, and it can become a ritual of self-honoring—an invitation to ask your body and heart what's *true* each day.

There is no right way to do this. The goal isn't to create "good" days or chase patterns. The goal is to build a relationship with your shifting internal state.

Try checking in with the following:

Mood: How would I describe my emotional tone today in a word or phrase?

Physical Energy: On a scale from 1–10, how much vitality do I feel in my body?

Desire Level: Do I feel interested, disconnected, curious, overwhelmed, neutral, aroused?

Touch Tolerance: Would I welcome touch today? Crave it? Avoid it? Feel unsure?

Notable Influences: Did anything happen physically, emotionally, or relationally that might be affecting me?

You can write these down, record them in a voice note, or simply say them aloud.

What matters is the act of ***noticing without judgment***.

Even if you feel nothing. Even if your answer is "*I don't know.*" That counts.

Weekly Reflections: Shifts, Patterns, and Insights

Just as the daily check-in helps you tune in to the present moment, the **weekly reflection** helps you zoom out and see the broader picture.

At the end of each week, take 10–15 minutes to reflect on what changed, what stayed the same, and what felt important or surprising.

This could look like asking yourself:

What was my relationship to desire this week?

Were there moments I felt more open? More closed?

What supported me in feeling connected to my body?

What seemed to create distance or numbness?

Did I discover anything new about how I relate to pleasure?

This is not about performance or progress. You're not building a case for or against your libido. You're simply listening across time.

You're practicing **relational presence**—with yourself, your rhythms, and your evolving erotic self.

Some weeks will feel blank. Some will feel rich. Some will feel chaotic. All of it matters.

Closing Reflections

There is nothing wrong with you if desire isn't showing up the way it used to.

There is nothing wrong with you if it's inconsistent. If it feels shy, confusing, or strange.

Your desire is not a machine.

It is not a switch you flip or a duty you perform.

It is a **seasonal visitor**. A living rhythm. A form of intelligence.

When you release the pressure to “get it back” or “figure it out,” you make space for something deeper: **trust**.

Trust that your body is speaking in its own language.

Trust that your pleasure will come in waves and ways you may not have experienced before, and that you are allowed to enjoy them without shame.

Trust that *not knowing* is part of the journey back to self, back to pleasure, back to connection.

You don't need to force desire. You only need to create space for it to return when it's ready.

And when it does—you'll be ready to receive it with the compassion you've been practicing all along.

Chapter 4:

Inner Dialogue & Emotional Honesty

What Gets in the Way of Desire?

Sometimes the biggest barriers to desire aren't physical—they're *internal*. Thoughts. Fears. Voices. Beliefs. The quiet things we tell ourselves when no one else is listening.

You may be doing everything “right”—sleeping well, caring for your body, even feeling physically ready—but still, desire doesn't rise. Or it rises briefly, only to be silenced by doubt, criticism, fear, or overwhelm.

This is completely normal. And it's not a sign that something is wrong with you.

It's a sign that your inner world needs attention.

Our inner dialogue—the way we speak to ourselves, interpret our feelings, and respond to our needs—shapes our experience of intimacy in profound ways. And often, that inner dialogue has been shaped by:

- Messages we learned growing up
- Cultural expectations about sex, love, and gender
- Trauma, grief, or medical experiences
- Past relationships that made us question our worth or desirability
- Pressure to “bounce back” during illness or major change

When desire feels far away, it's often not because we've “lost it.” It's because we're internally managing so much. Fear of rejection. Discomfort in our body. Worry about doing it “wrong.” Grief over how things used to feel.

This chapter is an invitation to listen more deeply—to what's being said inside your mind, and how it may be influencing your heart, body, and libido.

Shame, Pressure, Expectation, and Self-Judgment

Let's name some of the most common (and most invisible) obstacles to desire:

Shame

Shame whispers: *You're not normal. You should be over this by now. You're too much. You're not enough.*

It makes you believe your struggles with intimacy are unique or shameful, when in fact they are *deeply human*. Shame thrives in silence and secrecy. The moment you name it, it begins to loosen its grip.

Pressure

This can come from within or from others—real or imagined. Pressure to want more, to perform, to return to “how it used to be,” or to meet a partner’s needs even when yours feel buried. Pressure crushes curiosity. It turns intimacy into obligation.

And obligation is not desire. It’s survival.

Expectation

Expectations sound like:

- “I should be ready by now.”
- “We should be having sex again.”
- “I should feel turned on if things are going well.”
- “It should look like it used to.”

These “shoulds” often come from societal scripts, not our own truths. Desire often needs space from “should” in order to bloom.

Self-Judgment

The voice that says: *What's wrong with you? Why are you like this? No one else struggles like this.*

This voice can be loud, cruel, and persuasive. But it is not the truth. And it does not belong in the sacred space where desire is trying to grow.

Journaling Prompts for Compassion and Curiosity

Let's gently shift the tone of your inner dialogue. Instead of asking what's broken or trying to force change, these prompts invite you to *listen*, *witness*, and *tend*.

Prompts:

1. *What are the things I most often say to myself when I'm not feeling desire?*
Are those thoughts kind? Are they helpful? Where did they come from?

2. *What might my desire need to feel safer right now?*
(This could be safety from judgment, emotional pressure, physical discomfort, etc.)

3. *If my inner voice could sound more like a friend, what would it say to me today?*

4. *What am I afraid will happen if I fully accept my current relationship to desire—just as it is?*

5. *What parts of me feel tender when I try to think about sex or pleasure? What do those parts need?*

You can return to these prompts again and again. Their power grows not from dramatic breakthroughs, but from repetition, softness, and consistency.

Reframing “What’s Wrong With Me?” to “What’s True for Me Today?”

This is one of the most important shifts you can make in your healing and reclamation journey.

The old question:

“What’s wrong with me?”

...leads to shame, hiding, urgency, and disconnection.

It implies failure, dysfunction, and fault. It assumes there’s a right way to be—and you’re not it.

The new question:

“What’s true for me today?”

...leads to gentleness, presence, truth, and possibility.

It honors that your experience is valid—even if it’s complex, messy, or painful. It removes the need to “solve” and replaces it with the power to *listen*.

Practice: Reframe the Inner Critic

Take a sentence you’ve heard in your own mind—something self-critical. Now rewrite it as a compassionate truth.

Examples:

- ❌ *“Why don’t I want sex? What’s wrong with me?”*
✓ *“Right now, my body is asking for gentleness. I don’t need to rush.”*
- ❌ *“I’m broken.”*
✓ *“I’m healing. I’m adjusting. I’m allowed to be in process.”*
- ❌ *“No one would want me like this.”*
✓ *“I’m learning to want myself, and that is the first and most important thing.”*

Now you give it a try:

Let yourself feel the difference. One voice shuts you down. The other opens a door.

Mini Ritual: The Self-Compassion Mirror

1. Sit somewhere quiet with a mirror where you can look yourself in the eyes—or simply place your hand on your heart.
2. Take three deep breaths. Feel your feet, your body, your breath.
3. Say out loud or write down:

"There is nothing wrong with me. I'm allowed to be where I am."

"Desire doesn't define my worth."

"I am still whole. Still worthy. Still becoming."

Return to this ritual anytime shame creeps in. Let it be a tether back to your truth.

Closing Reflection

Being honest about your inner dialogue is one of the most vulnerable—and most freeing—parts of this journey.

You are not alone in this work.

The pressure, the self-doubt, the shame—they're not proof that something is wrong with you. They are echoes of a world that hasn't always known how to hold people with care.

But here, in these pages, you are doing something radical. You are *choosing* honesty. You are choosing to rewrite the story from inside out.

And you are doing it beautifully.

Chapter 5:

Your Erotic Ecosystem

Desire as Relational, Not Transactional

Desire does not live in a vacuum.

It's not a button you press or a script you follow. It's not a transaction—something you offer in exchange for closeness, validation, or attention. It's not a checklist to satisfy a partner or a performance to prove your worth.

Desire is relational.

It lives and breathes in context—between you and your body, between you and the environment, between you and another person, or between you and your own sense of safety.

We each have an erotic ecosystem—a unique web of factors that influence how we experience intimacy, touch, arousal, connection, and comfort. This ecosystem is made up of:

- Emotional climate (how supported, seen, or stressed you feel)
- Physical health and comfort
- Relationship dynamics
- Boundaries and permissions
- Safety—especially after medical trauma or disconnection
- Pleasure history (memories, conditioning, associations)
- Internal dialogue and self-trust
- Sensory preferences and aversions

Understanding your erotic ecosystem means realizing that libido doesn't come from one place—and it doesn't respond to just one input. You may crave emotional

closeness before physical closeness. You may need more alone time to feel sensual. You may discover that your erotic energy awakens when your nervous system is grounded, your environment is quiet, and you're not feeling observed.

This chapter is about getting to know the ingredients that help you feel erotically *alive*, and identifying what disrupts or shuts that aliveness down.

There is no one right combination. Your erotic ecosystem is *yours* to tend, protect, and explore.

What Kind of Touch Do You Crave (or Avoid)?

Touch is one of the most direct gateways to desire—and also one of the most layered, especially after illness, surgery, or emotional wounding.

You might feel:

- Hypersensitive in certain areas
- Numb in others
- Safe only when you initiate touch
- Triggered by certain forms of contact
- Craving closeness, but unsure how to receive it
- Open to being held but not stroked—or vice versa

All of that is normal.

Getting clear about the kind of touch you currently desire (and the kinds you avoid) is a compassionate act of self-attunement. You are not being “difficult” or “too much.” You are learning your boundaries and your needs—and that is the foundation of trust.

Try these self-reflections:

What kinds of touch make me exhale or soften?

What kinds of touch make me tense, brace, or check out?

When I crave touch, is it emotional, physical, sensual, or all three?

Do I feel more comfortable giving touch or receiving it?

Sometimes we think we're craving sex when we're actually craving containment. Or warmth. Or skin-to-skin presence with no agenda. The more you learn about what you *want* to feel through touch (as well as what you don't), the more agency you reclaim in your erotic ecosystem.

Creating a “Yes” List (and a “Maybe Later” List)

Desire thrives in consent—not just externally with others, but *internally*, with yourself.

Rather than deciding what you're “allowed” to feel or do based on some external standard, you get to build a personal *Yes List*—a living, breathing list of touch, connection, and pleasure that feels good, intriguing, or even just safe to imagine.

You also get to build a *Maybe Later List*—things you're unsure about, open to exploring down the line, or want to revisit with care.

This approach helps you stay grounded. It removes pressure. It gives you back your sovereignty.

Your “Yes” List Might Include:

- Warm showers or baths with music
- Being spooned or held while clothed
- Light fingertip touch on your back
- Rubbing your own feet with lotion
- Eye contact with no expectation
- Exploring your body with curiosity, not performance
- Using a silk scarf or soft object to awaken sensation
- Self-pleasure with a focus on breathing or sound

Your “Maybe Later” List Might Include:

- Erotic touch on certain body parts
- Shared nudity or partnered arousal
- Sexual intercourse or penetration
- Toys or aids you haven’t tried before
- Kink, role-play, fantasy, or energetic intimacy
- Even verbal expressions like “I want you”

These lists are *not static*. They may evolve daily, weekly, or with each season of healing. What matters is that they reflect *your* consent, your curiosity, and your current thresholds.

Now you give it a try!

YES LIST

MAYBE LATER LIST

Solo Pleasure, Partnered Pleasure, and Emotional Intimacy

Your erotic ecosystem includes how you relate to others—but it begins with how you relate to yourself.

There's no hierarchy here. Solo pleasure is just as sacred as partnered pleasure. Emotional intimacy is not a substitute for sex—it's a dimension of it. You get to define what intimacy means *now*, and you get to experiment with the ways that pleasure, arousal, and connection want to express themselves in your life.

Solo Pleasure

Solo pleasure is an opportunity to explore desire without performance. You can focus on:

- Breath and sensation
- Soothing, nurturing, or playful touch
- Noticing what feels good without needing to escalate
- Exploring fantasy or memory if it feels safe

Solo touch doesn't need to be about climax—it can be about aliveness, curiosity, or comfort.

Partnered Pleasure

If you are partnered, you might be navigating new terrain together. Communicating your changing needs is an act of vulnerability and bravery. It can be tender to say:

- “Can we slow way down?”
- “I’m not sure what I want yet, but I want to find out.”
- “Touch here feels good. There, not yet.”
- “Let’s explore without a goal tonight.”
- “Could we just hold each other and breathe for now?”

Shared eroticism can mean eye gazing, giving and receiving massage, dancing together, bathing, or resting skin to skin. I’m here to remind you that there are so many ways shared eroticism can be expressed that aren’t overtly sexual.

Emotional Intimacy

Often overlooked, emotional intimacy is a profound part of your erotic ecosystem. Feeling seen, understood, and respected can reignite trust in your own body. It can create the safety that allows desire to emerge naturally—without fear or pressure.

If you are not partnered, cultivating emotional intimacy with *yourself* can be just as powerful.

Ask:

“How do I hold myself when I’m tender?”

“What do I need to feel safe in my own presence?”

“Can I be patient with my own unfolding?”

Reflection Prompts & Embodied Practices

1. *“If I could create the ideal environment for my desire to awaken, it would include...”*

2. *“What kinds of touch have felt the most supportive, nourishing, or pleasurable in the past month?”*

3. *"My current Yes List includes... My Maybe Later List includes..." Did/does anything surprise me?*

4. *"What helps me feel emotionally close to someone—even without physical touch?"*

5. *"What would it look like to romance myself this week?"*

Activity: Design Your Erotic Ecosystem Map

Draw a circle in the center labeled “ME” or your name. Around it, draw branches or leaves for each part of your erotic ecosystem:

- Physical needs (touch, rest, space)
- Emotional needs (safety, affirmation, privacy)
- Sensory elements (lighting, music, texture, scent)
- Inner voice (what you need to hear)
- Relational needs (communication, play, trust)

This becomes a visual snapshot of what supports your aliveness and pleasure. Add to it over time.

Touch Practice: “The 5-Minute Body Invitation”

This can be done solo or with a partner.

1. Set a timer for 5 minutes.
2. Choose a small area of the body to explore (e.g., forearm, scalp, chest).
3. Offer light touch (stroking, pressing, circling) or just still presence.
4. With each breath, ask:
“Do I want more, less, or something different?”
“What feels welcome right now?”
5. Let the body lead. No goal. Just inquiry.

This builds trust with your body’s voice. Over time, this small practice can become a sacred daily ritual.

Closing Encouragement

Your erotic ecosystem is sacred. It is allowed to be tender. It is allowed to be slow. It is allowed to bloom again and again in different ways.

You are not too complicated. You are not too changed. You are not too much.

Rather, you are wise. You are evolving. You are worthy of pleasure, on your own terms.

In tending to your ecosystem with care, you reclaim not just desire—but the full aliveness of being. Your being.

Chapter 6:

Your Body, Now

Befriending Your Body During Illness or Change of Any Kind

Your body has been carrying you through so much. Having an illness can really take a toll on your feelings of attractiveness as well as your experience of desire and arousal.

You may feel like a stranger to your own skin. You may feel anger, grief, numbness, pride, or all of the above. And still, this body is yours. Not the body you had before. Not the one you're supposed to "get back."

But the one you're in *now*—breathing, beating, becoming.

This chapter is not about "fixing" your relationship with your body. It's about **reweaving it**. It's about learning how to sit with your body like an old friend you haven't seen in a while—tentatively, gently, with curiosity and kindness.

This version of your body holds is holding new stories. It may need new language, new care, and new boundaries.

It also holds the capacity for new forms of pleasure, trust, and self-expression.

You are not behind. You are simply here.

And that is more than enough.

Body Mapping Exercise (Written, Sensory, or Visual)

This exercise is an invitation to explore your body not through judgment or measurement, but through *presence*. To listen to what each part of you holds, remembers, needs—or doesn't want.

You can do this:

- With writing (a journal list or narrative)
- With drawing (a body outline, colored in with sensations or emotions)
- With touch (a slow exploration of your own body using your hands or a soft object)
- Or all three, combined

Approach it like a conversation, not an exam. There is no “right” answer.

Written Body Mapping

Sit quietly and breathe. Starting from your head, work your way down to your different body parts, asking:

- What do I feel here?
- What memories live here?
- What does this part of me need?
- Is there sensation? Numbness? Tension? Tenderness?

Example:

“My chest feels guarded. There’s heaviness and tenderness there. I remember holding my breath in the waiting room before every scan. I want to soften there, but I also want to protect myself.”

Visual Body Mapping

Draw or print a simple outline of a body.

Use colors, symbols, or words to represent:

- Areas of ease or tension
- Sites of pleasure or grief
- Parts that feel neutral, confusing, awakened, numb
- Where you want more connection, and where you want space

Don't worry about making it beautiful—just make it *true*.

Sensory Body Mapping

Choose one area of your body at a time to bring slow, intentional touch.

You might try:

- Gentle pressing
- Feather-light stroking
- Holding your hand still over an area
- Using a textured item (silk, wool, a stone)

As you explore, ask:

“What is the sensation here?”

“What emotion, if any, comes up?”

“Is this a place I want to come back to—or leave for now?”

Pause often. Let your body set the pace.

What Your Body Longs to Say

Your body may not speak in words, but it is always communicating. It may be whispering—or it may be screaming. Either way, it deserves to be heard.

Sometimes it's asking for more attention. Sometimes it's asking for space. Sometimes it wants to be touched differently. Or called by a new name. Or simply *acknowledged*.

In the presence of illness or change, we often go into management mode—navigating appointments, pain, logistics, and survival. The body becomes something to handle. But underneath that is still a longing for connection, for attunement, for gentleness.

This practice is about listening inward. Not trying to get your body to want sex or pleasure—but instead asking:

“What does my body long for today?”

“What does it need to feel seen, honored, or soothed?”

Prompt: If My Body Could Speak Freely...

Write a short letter from your body to you. Let it express anything it's been holding.

Examples:

- *“Thank you for finally resting. I've been so tired.”*
- *“I'm still scared to be touched, but I miss being held.”*
- *“Please stop comparing me to who I used to be. I'm doing my best.”*
- *“I want to move again. Slowly. Without force.”*

Then, write a reply to your body. You might say:

- *“I'm listening now.”*
- *“I didn't realize how much you were holding.”*
- *“I'm sorry I've been rushing you.”*
- *“I want to learn how to trust you again.”*

This practice can be incredibly emotional. Take your time. You can return to it any day.

Small Rituals for Body Gratitude and Connection

Ritual is a bridge. It helps us move from thinking into feeling, from intention into action.

You don't need candles or crystals (though you can use them!). A ritual is simply an act made sacred through attention.

Here are some gentle rituals to reconnect with your body after illness, change, or distance.

1. The Daily Touch-In

Each morning or evening, place your hands on your body—heart, belly, or anywhere that feels safe.

Say aloud:

"This is my body. I greet you. I'm listening."

Let your hands linger. Let your breath soften.

2. The Loving Bath or Shower

Turn your bath or shower into a moment of sensual presence.

Use touch, temperature, texture. Let the water cleanse not just your skin but your expectations.

As you wash, repeat inwardly:

"I deserve tenderness. I deserve time. I deserve to feel home here."

3. Body Balm Ritual

Choose a lotion, oil, or balm you enjoy. As you apply it to your body, slow down.

Move in circles. Linger in places you usually rush past.

Speak words of thanks to each part of your body.

Example:

- *“Thank you, feet, for carrying me.”*
- *“Thank you, thighs, for being strong and soft.”*
- *“Thank you, scars, for being part of my story.”*

4. The Mirror Ceremony (Optional, Advanced)

This may feel vulnerable—do only when you’re ready.

Sit or stand in front of a mirror. Gaze at your body without adjusting or evaluating.

Place one hand on your heart and say:

“I’m learning to see you again. You are still mine. You are still beautiful.”

Repeat until the voice softens—even if only a little.

Reflection Prompts & Activities

1. *“What parts of my body feel most familiar right now? What parts feel unfamiliar?”*

2. *“When have I felt most at home in my body? What helped me feel that way?”*

3. *“What boundaries do I want to honor with my body right now?”*

4. *“What kind of relationship do I want to build with my body moving forward?”*

5. *“What’s one thing I’m grateful to my body for—even if I’m also frustrated with it?”*

Activity: “My Body, Now” Collage

Create a visual expression of your current body relationship using:

- Images from magazines
- Colors, textures, and fabrics
- Words or affirmations
- Photos or sketches (optional)

You can make this digital or by hand. Let it reflect your truth—complex, tender, whole. Display it somewhere private, or tuck it into your journal as a quiet offering to yourself.

Closing Encouragement

You are not behind. You are not broken. You are not too much or not enough.

Your body is not just a vessel.

It is a story. A teacher. A companion.

And even now—*especially now*—it is worthy of care, of presence, of love.

Take your time. Reconnection is not a race. It is a homecoming.

And your body is already waiting for you—just as you are for it.

Chapter 7:

Pleasure Practices and Gentle Experiments

Micro-Moments of Pleasure: Finding Pleasure in Ordinary Life

Pleasure does not begin in the bedroom.
It begins in the body. In the breath. In the *now*.

Especially during illness or trauma, pleasure can feel like something distant or risky. You may associate it with your “old life” or feel like you need to reclaim it all at once in order to feel whole again.

But here’s the truth:

Pleasure is already here. It’s already available in micro-moments—if we slow down enough to notice.

A warm sip of tea.

A patch of sunlight on your chest.

The feel of soft fabric across your skin.

The quiet sensation of breath moving through your body.

A piece of music that brings your heart back to itself.

These are not lesser forms of pleasure. They are *foundational*. They remind your nervous system that you are safe, that you are sensing, and that you are still capable of joy, even in small, quiet doses.

In this chapter, you’re invited to begin a **practice of noticing pleasure** without expectation. No pressure to feel aroused. No need to “get somewhere.” Just a practice of turning toward what feels *even a little bit good*—and letting that be enough. This is where desire begins again. Not in intensity. But in **presence**.

Trying Something New: A “Low-Stakes” Experiment Menu

You don’t need to dive headfirst into intense intimacy to reawaken your connection to pleasure. In fact, starting too fast can sometimes trigger overwhelm or shutdown.

That’s why we begin with *low-stakes experiments*—simple, curiosity-led invitations to explore what feels good *today*. Not what used to feel good. Not what you think “should” feel good. Just what’s *available now*.

These experiments don’t need to lead to anything. Their only job is to invite aliveness.

Here’s a menu of gentle, doable experiments you can try solo or share with a partner, friend, or caregiver—depending on what feels right.

Touch Experiments

- Rub a smooth stone or piece of fabric across your inner wrist
- Wrap yourself in a warm blanket and breathe into the sensation
- Glide a hairbrush over your scalp slowly
- Try slow, rhythmic pressure on the soles of your feet or base of your spine

Sound + Vibration

- Lie down and place your hand on your chest while listening to deep, resonant music
- Hum softly and feel the vibration in your throat and lips
- Put a small speaker under a pillow and feel the music’s movement as you rest

Temperature Play

- Alternate a warm cloth and a cool object (like a metal spoon) on your skin
- Run warm water over your hands, then cold—then back to warm
- Let sunlight or fresh air touch bare skin and just *feel*

Taste and Scent

- Smell herbs or spices and describe the emotion they evoke
- Savor one piece of fruit as slowly as possible—how many textures and flavors can you notice?
- Light a candle and focus only on how the scent makes your body feel (not what it reminds you of)

The goal of these experiments is not arousal. It's **curiosity**.

It's reawakening your sensory body in a way that feels safe, present, and choiceful.

Sensate Focus & Non-Goal-Oriented Touch

Sensate focus is a therapeutic practice developed to help people reconnect with sensation, pleasure, and intimacy—especially when dealing with physical changes, anxiety, or trauma.

The core idea?

Touch for the sake of touch. Not for performance. Not to “get somewhere.”

Just to *feel*.

You can do this practice solo or with a partner. It's about *experiencing*, not achieving.

Solo Sensate Focus Practice

1. Choose a 5–10 minute window when you won't be interrupted.
2. Get comfortable—seated, lying down, or standing.
3. Pick one small area of your body (e.g., forearm, jaw, thigh).
4. Use your fingers, breath, or an object (like a scarf or lotion) to explore that area.
5. As you explore, notice:
 - Pressure: Do I want more or less?
 - Texture: Do I prefer smooth, firm, soft, bumpy?
 - Response: Am I softening, numbing, resisting, relaxing?

No need to fix anything. Just witness.

You can say to yourself:

“I’m allowed to be here. I’m allowed to feel this—or not.”

Partnered Sensate Focus (if applicable)

1. Set a timer for 5 minutes. One partner gives touch; the other only *receives*.
2. The giver explores a small area of the receiver's body with neutral, attentive touch—no goal.
3. The receiver notices sensation, breath, and emotional responses.
4. Then switch roles, or pause and share what you noticed.

This practice can be incredibly healing when done with clear boundaries and consent.

Reminder: You can stop or adjust at any time. Your boundaries are sacred.

If you'd like to go deeper with your Sensate Focus practice, you can explore our [Sensate Focus resource in the Cancer and Intimacy store](#).

Prompts for Noticing: “What Surprised Me? What Softened?”

In every gentle experiment, pause afterward to reflect—not for critique, but for noticing. These prompts will help you tune into the wisdom of your body *without pressure*.

Journal Prompts

1. “What surprised me?”

Was there a moment I felt more than I expected? Less? Something unexpected?

2. “What softened?”

Did my breath shift? Did my thoughts slow? Did I feel more at home in any part of my body?

3. “What felt neutral—or even unpleasant?”

That’s useful information. What might that part of me need in the future?

4. *“What would I like to try again? What would I change?”*

5. *“What part of me felt most awake, present, or connected?”*

Over time, these reflections help you rebuild trust—not only with pleasure, but with your *own ability to navigate it gently*.

Bonus Ritual: “Three Moments of Pleasure a Day”

This is a daily practice you can keep in your journal:

Each day, write down:

1. One thing I saw today that brought me beauty or delight
2. One sensation I enjoyed (even if brief or small)
3. One moment where I felt even a flicker of aliveness

Examples:

- The way the breeze touched my neck
- The feeling of lotion between my fingers
- A line in a poem that made me inhale more deeply
- The warmth of tea in my throat
- Laughing, even for a second

This trains the brain and nervous system to *orient toward pleasure*, without denying any of the real, hard things. It's not toxic positivity—it's **ritualized noticing**.

Closing Reflection: Building a Life That Feels

Pleasure isn't selfish. It isn't frivolous. It isn't reserved for when everything else is "fixed."

Pleasure is how the body remembers it is *still alive*. Even in grief. Even in change. Even in the in-between.

You don't need to reclaim your entire sexuality in one dramatic act.

You can begin here—with your breath, your skin, your curiosity. You can begin again and again.

Your body is not asking you to be perfect. It's asking you to be *present*.

Let your pleasure come as it comes—small, soft, brave.

You are already doing it beautifully.

Chapter 8:

When Libido Feels Absent

Holding the Space for Numbness, Fatigue, or Fear

There will be days when desire feels absent.

When you can't find a spark, not even a flicker. When your body feels like a mystery—or a burden. When pleasure seems like a foreign language you once knew but can't speak anymore.

This chapter is for *those* days.

Not to fix them. Not to rush you past them. But to create a gentle, honest space where you can be with what's real—without judgment, shame, or pressure.

Sometimes the body is tired. Sometimes the heart is heavy. Sometimes you're managing medications, hormone shifts, physical pain, or unspoken grief. Sometimes the world is too loud or your life is too full. Sometimes your system is just doing what it needs to do: protecting you, conserving energy, tending to invisible wounds.

When libido feels absent, it doesn't mean you've failed. It doesn't mean you've lost anything forever. It means that your inner landscape is in a season of rest, retreat, or reorganization.

This chapter is an invitation to **make peace with the quiet**. To hold yourself with the same tenderness you would offer a dear friend who is grieving, or healing, or simply overwhelmed. To stay present with yourself, even in the absence of spark.

Loving Yourself Through the “Off” Days

It's easy to love ourselves when we're energized, vibrant, connected, inspired.

It's harder when we feel blank. When our bodies feel unfamiliar. When we don't want anything—not sex, not closeness, not even touch.

But these are the days that need your **deepest care**. These are the days when self-love becomes a practice of *presence*, not preference.

What would it mean to stop performing resilience? To stop pushing for progress? To stop judging yourself for not wanting more?

What if you said instead:

- *“I’m allowed to not feel anything today.”*
- *“My body doesn’t need to be productive to be worthy.”*
- *“There’s no prize for pretending I’m okay.”*

Loving yourself through the “off” days might look like:

- Taking a long bath with no goal but comfort
- Cancelling plans without guilt
- Watching your favorite show in bed, wrapped in softness
- Letting someone else make the decisions
- Crying without needing a reason
- Holding your belly, your chest, or your face, and saying: “I’m here.”

The absence of desire is not the absence of you. It is not a void. It is a *pause*. And you are still whole, still sacred, still enough—even here.

Journaling Through Grief, Disinterest, or Feeling Broken

Sometimes what feels like a lack of libido is actually **grief in disguise**.

Grief for a body that's changed. A relationship that didn't last. A version of you who used to feel sexy, playful, or alive.

Sometimes it's disinterest rooted in overwhelm, overstimulation, or sensory burnout. Sometimes it's the quiet echo of medical trauma or loss that hasn't had time to speak.

This is your space to let those truths rise. You don't need to organize them. Just let them *exist*.

Try writing to these:

"I miss the part of me who used to..."

"The hardest part about not feeling desire is..."

"What I wish someone would say to me right now is..."

"When I feel broken, I try to remember..."

"I don't feel anything right now. And that's okay. But if I could feel something, I'd want it to be..."

These words don't need to be beautiful. They don't need to be shared. They just need to be *honest*.

Sometimes naming the feeling is what creates just enough space for something new to breathe.

Rebuilding Trust With Your Own Pace

The world around you might tell you to push. To power through. To get “back to normal.”

But your body?

Your body wants to be met where it is.

Rebuilding trust is not about doing more. It’s about proving—again and again—that you will not abandon yourself, even when things are quiet or unclear.

Start small.

Start with:

- 5 minutes of lying down and asking: “How are you, really?”
- Gently massaging your hands or feet without trying to “feel” anything
- Letting your breath move naturally and placing one hand on your heart
- Saying out loud: *“I’m not rushing you. I’m listening.”*

Desire returns when it knows it’s safe. When it knows it won’t be judged. When it’s invited, not demanded.

Every time you choose gentleness over urgency, curiosity over shame, presence over productivity—you rebuild that trust. And in that trust, something shifts. Sometimes it’s a spark. Sometimes it’s just a softening. Sometimes it’s rest.

All of it counts.

Closing Reflections

There is wisdom in absence. There is medicine in the pause.

There is dignity in the days when you don't feel sexy, radiant, turned on, or even okay.

You are not a problem to solve. You are a person in process. And when desire feels far away, your job is not to chase it.

Your job is to hold space. To keep the hearth warm. To remember that *you* are still here. Desire will return in its own season, in its own way, with its own voice.

And when it does, it will find you waiting—not impatiently, but lovingly.

Still whole. Still worthy. Still yours.

Chapter 9:

Reimagining Intimacy and Desire

Beyond Intercourse: Intimacy in Many Forms

For many people, the idea of intimacy becomes tangled with pressure, grief, or confusion. You may ask yourself:

- *Is intimacy still possible for me?*
- *What if my body can't do what it used to?*
- *What even counts as intimacy now?*

These are powerful, tender questions—and they are exactly the right ones to ask.

This chapter is an invitation to *expand* your definition of intimacy and desire.

To move beyond old expectations.

To let go of scripts that no longer fit.

To discover—maybe for the first time—what feels true for *you*, now.

Intimacy is not a single act. It's not defined by intercourse or orgasm or anyone else's idea of what should happen in a bedroom.

Intimacy is connection. It's attention. It's presence. It's the energy of being known and received, and the experience of offering that to someone else—or to yourself.

You may find intimacy in:

- Holding hands in silence
- Eye contact that lingers without needing to speak
- Massaging your own feet at night with care
- A shared meal prepared with affection
- Being fully clothed and completely vulnerable
- A hand resting over your heart, saying: *I'm here.*

Desire lives in so many places—not just in genitals, but in the breath, in the eyes, in the voice, in imagination, in memories, in sensation, in slowness.

Your job is not to return to the old map.

It's to create a **new one**—based on your truth, your thresholds, your current body and longings. That's where reimagined intimacy begins.

What Does Intimacy Mean to Me, Now?

During cancer, illness, trauma, heartbreak, your definition of intimacy may shift. That's not a problem. That's *growth*.

Old forms of intimacy may no longer feel accessible or satisfying. Or they may carry grief, confusion, or discomfort. You are allowed to mourn what has changed. But you are also allowed to **invent something new**.

Start with this question:

What does intimacy mean to me now—not what it used to mean, not what it's supposed to mean, but what feels meaningful now?

For you, intimacy might now mean:

- Emotional transparency
- Closeness without urgency
- Eye contact while fully clothed
- Gentle eroticism that honors your boundaries
- Stillness, comfort, and being touched without expectation
- Playfulness, exploration, or just *not feeling alone*

You don't need to define intimacy for anyone else—just for yourself.

And that definition?

It can change. It can grow. It can stretch and contract and reorient with every season of your life.

What matters is that it is *yours*.

Journal Prompts for Reimagining Intimacy and Desire

Reclaiming Definitions

1. *What does intimacy mean to me now—emotionally, physically, energetically?*

2. *How has my definition of intimacy changed over time?*

3. *What parts of the old script still feel true? What parts feel outdated or painful?*

4. *When I think about desire, what feelings arise: curiosity, grief, fear, hope?*

Beyond Intercourse

5. *What are five ways I currently experience intimacy that have nothing to do with sex?*

6. *What moments of closeness feel the most nourishing to me?*

7. *What kinds of touch, presence, or connection make me feel emotionally or sensually safe?*

Future Visions: Desire in 6 Months, 1 Year, 5 Years

Right now, your relationship with desire may feel tender, unpredictable, or quiet. That's okay.

But what if you let yourself dream forward? Not to create pressure—but to invite possibility.

This section is an invitation to imagine your desire *not as something to get back*, but as something that's still unfolding.

Desire in 6 months might look like:

- Wanting to be touched in a new way
- Feeling more curious about your body
- Scheduling time for sensual exploration—even just for yourself

Desire in 1 year might look like:

- Having conversations about pleasure with confidence
- Trying something new with a partner—or with yourself
- Letting sensuality and slowness become part of your daily life

Desire in 5 years might look like:

- Feeling free to express who you are erotically
- Living in a body you trust, even if it's changed
- Redefining intimacy as something sacred, expansive, and chosen

Your vision doesn't have to be precise. It doesn't have to be sexual. It just has to be *true*. Let it come from your own longing—not what you think you should want, but what quietly stirs when you let yourself imagine.

Even if you don't feel desire now, you are allowed to believe it will come again.

And that it will come *on your terms*.

Here are some prompts to ignite your imagination:

Future Visions

If nothing about my body or situation had to change, what kind of intimacy would I want more of?

In six months, I'd love to feel more...

In one year, I hope I've explored...

In five years, I imagine myself...

(You can answer these in terms of relationships, pleasure, solo practices, emotional connection, or body trust.)

Cultivating an Erotic Vision Board or Statement

Let's make this dreaming tangible.

Your erotic vision board or statement is not about manifesting a fantasy. It's about **externalizing what you value, what you're curious about, what kind of connection you want to build**—with others, with your body, and with desire itself.

You can do this visually, through collage, or through writing. You can do it in one sitting or in fragments over time.

For a vision board:

Use images, words, textures, and colors that evoke the mood of your desired future.

Ask:

- What kind of intimacy do I want to welcome?
- What kind of pleasure feels possible or intriguing?
- What kind of safety, self-expression, or boldness do I want to explore?

Include not just what turns you on, but what softens you, what grounds you, what expands you.

For a vision statement:

Try starting with phrases like:

- *"I envision a relationship with desire that feels..."*
- *"I want to experience intimacy as..."*
- *"My erotic self is allowed to be..."*
- *"Even if I don't feel ready now, I imagine one day..."*

You can revisit and rewrite this vision as often as you like. Let it be a living document, not a fixed destination.

Your erotic vision is *not* a to-do list.

It's an *invitation*—to return, when you're ready, to the firelight of your own longing.

Closing Reflections

You are not who you were. Your intimacy is not what it used to be. And that's okay.

Desire does not only live in the past. It lives in possibility. You get to decide what intimacy means.

You get to choose what desire looks like in this chapter of your life. You get to reimagine eroticism as something that begins with presence, not performance.

Even if you never return to the old scripts, you are allowed to write new ones. Even if no one else understands your vision, you are allowed to live inside it. You are the author. The muse. The body. The spark. The one who gets to say:

"This, right here—this is what intimacy means to me now."

And that is more than enough.

Chapter 10:

Partnered Reflections and Shared Exploration

If You Have a Partner: Prompts for Shared Exploration

If you're navigating this journey with a partner, the landscape of intimacy and desire can feel like unfamiliar terrain—for both of you. This chapter is here to offer gentle tools and prompts that support connection, communication, and mutual curiosity without pressure.

Whether you've been together for decades or just a little while, post-cancer intimacy can require **new language, new courage, and new tenderness**. It asks both people to slow down, soften, and find each other again—sometimes in ways that feel brand new.

This chapter doesn't assume your partnership is perfect or easy. It simply invites you to reflect, explore, and re-meet one another in this current season.

To ask:

What has changed between us?

What do we miss?

What might be possible now that wasn't before?

There's no one "right" way to heal or connect. What matters is that the process honors **both of your truths**, even if they're different.

Communicating Without Pressure

For many couples, the hardest part about rebuilding intimacy is not the physical aspect—it's the unspoken expectations, the awkwardness, the fear of saying the wrong thing.

During illness or major life transition, conversations about sex, touch, and closeness can feel vulnerable or emotionally loaded.

What if I say too much?

What if I say the wrong thing?

What if they don't feel the same?

Here's the truth: *It's okay to be scared.* It's okay to not know what to say. What matters is that you start talking, gently.

Here are a few communication agreements you might try:

- We'll speak with honesty and kindness, not urgency or expectation.
- We'll pause if we feel overwhelmed, and return later when it feels safe.
- We'll let silence be part of the conversation—it's not a failure.
- We'll speak from personal experience ("I feel...") instead of assumptions ("You always...").
- We'll prioritize understanding each other over fixing each other.

And remember: communication doesn't always mean *talking*. It can happen through notes, drawings, music, even shared silence. What matters is that it helps you feel seen—and allows your partner to feel seen, too.

Writing Letters (Shared or Unsent)

Sometimes the most honest truths are the hardest to speak aloud. That's why letter-writing can be such a powerful tool for intimacy.

You might write to:

- Your partner
- Yourself
- Your body
- Your desire
- Or even your grief

You don't have to share the letter. You might write it just to witness your own voice. Or, if it feels safe, you might offer it to your partner as a bridge.

A letter can say:

- "Here's what I miss..."
- "Here's what I'm scared to tell you..."
- "Here's what I hope for us..."
- "Here's what's been hard that I don't know how to explain..."
- "Here's what I want, even if I'm not ready yet..."

Writing clears the fog. It gives your inner voice space to speak without interruption. And it gives your relationship a deeper well of honesty to draw from.

Co-Creating Intimacy During Cancer

Your intimacy—your shared connection—can look different now. And that difference doesn't mean it's broken. It means it's **alive**.

To co-create intimacy after illness, you don't have to go back to what you were. You're allowed to become something new, together.

It may involve:

- Slower rhythms
- New definitions of pleasure
- Different roles or preferences
- More tenderness, less performance
- More laughter, fewer expectations

You are not alone if this feels hard. But you are not broken if this feels *different*.

Healing together means honoring each other's grief, yes—but also each other's longings. It means practicing intimacy not just as sex, but as **presence, play, ritual, attention, and mutual care**.

You get to create that—bit by bit, moment by moment.

Journal + Partner Prompts

These can be done together or separately. If done alone, you might choose to share your responses later, or simply let them inform your inner clarity.

Shared Exploration

What does intimacy look like to you now? What does it feel like?

How has our connection changed since the cancer experience?

What's something you miss, and what's something you're surprised to have discovered?

What feels tender to bring up, but important to talk about?

How do you feel most loved or wanted by me?

What's something we could try together that feels low-pressure and connecting?

Letter Writing Starters

- “Dear partner, here’s what I’ve been carrying...”
- “Dear body, I want you to know...”
- “Dear desire, I’m ready to hear from you when you’re ready...”
- “Dear self, thank you for...”
- “Dear us, I imagine a future where...”

Intimacy Co-Creation Ideas

- Create a “Yes / Maybe / Not Yet” list around different kinds of touch or connection
- Invent a weekly ritual for connection (not necessarily sexual)
- Try giving each other 3 minutes of uninterrupted attention—no words, just presence
- Explore one small, sensual activity together (shared hand massage, slow dance, listening to music)

Closing Reflections

There's no single map for how to navigate partnered intimacy post-cancer. But there *is* a compass:

It points toward tenderness.

It listens for truth.

It makes room for both your voice and theirs.

You are not required to perform desire.

You are invited to **co-create it**, in ways that nourish, honor, and inspire the life you're building now.

Chapter 11:

Monthly Check-Ins & Review Pages

Why Monthly Check-Ins Matter

One of the kindest things we can do for ourselves—especially in times of healing or change—is to look back with soft eyes and say, *“Look at me. I made it here.”*

Monthly check-ins aren't about keeping score. They're about **witnessing your evolution with compassion**. They help you see patterns, shifts, surprises, and small wins you might otherwise overlook. And they offer space to recalibrate—to let go of what's not serving, and recommit to what nourishes.

In the landscape of libido and intimacy, this reflection is especially powerful. Because desire is fluid. It doesn't respond well to pressure—but it does respond to presence.

These monthly pages invite you to come back to yourself—gently and truthfully.

Monthly Libido Reflections (4+ Templates)

Below are four core reflection templates you can revisit at the end of each month (or lunar cycle, or treatment phase, or whenever it feels right for you). You can rotate through them, repeat your favorites, or modify them completely. Each reflection includes journal prompts to guide your awareness.

Reflection 1: “Where Am I Now?”

What have I noticed in my body this month?

What emotions have been most present?

What kinds of touch (if any) felt nourishing, neutral, or uncomfortable?

How connected or disconnected did I feel from my libido?

One moment this month where I felt most *myself* was...

Optional Add-On: Draw a simple energy map (physical, emotional, sensual, relational) like we did in Chapter 3. Color it in. Mark it with words or shapes. Let it speak for this chapter of your experience.

Reflection 2: “What Surprised Me?”

Did I experience any new or unexpected desires?

Did I try anything that felt like a stretch or experiment?

What delighted or intrigued me—even if it felt small?

What softened in me this month?

This is a great place to celebrate micro-moments of pleasure, connection, or even courageous rest.

Reflection 3: “What Felt Tender?”

What challenged me this month in my relationship with intimacy, body, or self?

What emotions came up around sexuality, identity, or touch?

Was there any grief I encountered—old or new?

What am I still holding gently or carefully?

Remember: Tenderness is not a weakness. It's an invitation to care deeply for the parts of you that are still healing.

Reflection 4: “What Do I Want to Carry Forward?”

What felt good or supportive this month that I’d like more of?

What practice, perspective, or way of being helped me stay connected to myself?

Is there a ritual, phrase, or pleasure practice I’d like to continue?

Let this check-in be less about resolutions and more about invitations. What would feel good to welcome, again and again?

“Then and Now” Exercises

Growth often unfolds so slowly we don't realize it's happening. These “Then and Now” prompts help track your inner shifts with loving awareness.

You might return to these every few months, or at milestones (like treatment completion, anniversaries, birthdays, or emotional turning points).

Journal Prompts:

When I began this journal, I felt _____ about libido.

Now I feel _____.

My relationship with my body has shifted from _____
to _____.

My definition of intimacy has changed in these ways:

One thing I feared then that feels softer now is:

Something I've surprised myself with is:

Your Libido Lexicon: Words That Reflect Your Current Sexual Self

Words shape our experience. The language we use around libido and desire has often been limited, clinical, or performative.

This section invites you to **reclaim your words**. To explore the metaphors, images, phrases, and feelings that reflect your **current experience of sexuality—however tender, evolving, or undefinable it may be**.

Wordplay Prompts:

If my libido had a voice, it would say...

A word or phrase that captures how I feel about my sexual self now is...

Sensuality feels like... (describe through textures, colors, images)

Intimacy, to me, is... (write without censoring yourself)

A new word I'd like to try on is...

You might write a poem, a playlist, or a personal glossary. Let your lexicon be as metaphorical or literal as you like. There are no wrong answers.

What I've Learned. What I Want to Keep. What I Want to Let Go.

This final check-in of the chapter is an invitation to **harvest**. To acknowledge what's ripened, what's still growing, and what can be lovingly released.

Harvest Prompts:

What have I learned about myself this month?

What do I want to keep close as I move forward?

What am I ready to let go of?

What part of me deserves a thank you right now?

You might end each month with a small ritual:

- Light a candle for what you've kept
- Tear up a page to symbolize release
- Take a bath or walk in nature to honor your process
- Read your earlier entries and notice what's changed

Final Thoughts

This chapter is not a test. There are no grades here, no benchmarks to meet.

Only your story, unfolding in real time.

Let your monthly check-ins be a conversation with your own becoming. A place to listen, honor, soften, and surprise yourself.

You are not here to force progress. You are here to **remember your aliveness**, one reflection at a time.

Chapter 12:

Closing Reflections

Your Libido Journal Is Never Finished

This journal may be coming to an end, but *you* are not.

There's no final chapter to your relationship with desire. No last word, no ultimate definition, no perfect conclusion. Like the body itself, your libido is alive. It shifts, adapts, quiets, awakens. It moves at the speed of truth—not the speed of productivity, performance, or pressure.

This is not the end of your story. It's a pause. A breath. A hand on your heart that says, *Look how far you've come.*

Whether you filled every page or just returned to a few sections that resonated most, your presence in this journal matters. Your curiosity, your honesty, your softness, your grit—they've shaped this space into something sacred.

This journal doesn't close a chapter of your life. It opens you more deeply to it.

Desire As a Living, Breathing Part of You

We've said this before, and it bears repeating: **libido is not a score to track**. It is not a test to pass. It is not a destination.

Libido is a form of aliveness. Sometimes it speaks in tingles, sometimes in silence. Sometimes it floods the body, and sometimes it retreats like a tide. It may not look or feel the way it once did. That doesn't make it wrong. It makes it *real*.

What you've been doing in these pages is not just journaling—you've been **tending a relationship**. A relationship with your body, your longing, your boundaries, your past and your present.

You've honored grief. You've explored sensuality. You've asked better questions. You've tried gentle experiments. You've met yourself again and again.

That is the work. That is the healing. That is the desire that matters—not the one shaped by culture, expectation, or comparison, but the one shaped by *you*.

Trusting Your Own Rhythm

There may be days ahead where you feel fully in touch with your body, your erotic energy, your capacity for intimacy. There may also be days where you feel numb, distant, or unsure all over again.

Both are valid.

Your job isn't to *stay* turned on or *achieve* intimacy every day. Your job is to return. To return again and again to the **rhythm that is yours**. The one that ebbs and flows with the seasons of your life, the texture of your emotions, the stories your body still holds.

This journal wasn't about turning you into someone new. It was about helping you *listen* more deeply to the person you already are.

So if you feel unsure, keep listening.

If you feel tender, keep listening.

If you feel a quiet hum of possibility returning—maybe for the first time in a long while—keep listening.

Your rhythm is wise. It will never lead you wrong.

Encouragement for Next Steps

You may feel complete with this journal. Or you may feel the urge to keep going—exploring, creating, connecting, expanding.

Whatever you choose, here are a few gentle next steps if you want them:

Coaching or Support

If you'd like more guided support, consider seeking out:

- A therapist or coach who understands intimacy in the face of illness
- A support group for people navigating sexuality during or after cancer
- A peer or partner you can explore this with safely and slowly

CancerAndIntimacy.com offers a range of resources, including coaching, community, conversation and communication resources, and other educational tools. You're invited to explore them. No pressure; just possibility. Learn more about our coaching offerings here: www.cancerandintimacy.com/coaching/

Continued Journaling

You can keep using this journal as a monthly reflection space—or begin a new notebook entirely.

You might track:

- Sensory pleasures you discover
- Shifts in desire or connection
- Questions you're still living into

There is no “done.” Only deeper.

Celebrating the You That's Emerging

Celebrate the tenderness you showed yourself.

Celebrate the courage it took to begin.

Celebrate the fact that even now—maybe especially now—you are willing to care for your aliveness.

That is no small thing.

A Final Word

If this journal has offered anything, may it be this:

You are not broken. You are becoming.

You are worthy of a desire that fits *you*, not a script.

You are worthy of rest and rage and radiant pleasure.

You are worthy of curiosity that doesn't lead to a conclusion.

You are worthy of a body that changes—and keeps loving.

Desire is not what makes you lovable. But letting yourself be loved—even here, even now—*might* just be what brings desire home again.

Thank you for walking these pages.

You are never alone in this.

And you are always allowed to begin again. And again. And again.

Appendix A: Resources for Continued Exploration

Whether you're feeling frustrated, curious, hopeful, or all of the above—there are many excellent tools, books, and educators who can help you keep learning, exploring, and growing. You don't have to figure it all out on your own.

Here's a list of recommended resources to support your journey—personally and relationally.

Understanding Libido, Arousal & Desire

- **Come As You Are** by Emily Nagoski, PhD

A foundational book about the science of desire, including libido differences, stress, context, and sexual brakes and accelerators.

- **The Mismatched Libido Workbook** by Christine Hyde

A workbook designed specifically for couples navigating differences in sexual desire.

- **Sex When You Don't Feel Like It** by Cyndi Darnell

For anyone—regardless of libido level—looking to understand the psychological and emotional aspects of sex and how to work with avoidance or frustration.

- **Subtle Sexuality** - www.subtle-sexuality.com

For anyone—regardless of health status or libido—curious about exploring intimacy, pleasure, and desire in slower, gentler, and more nuanced ways. This emerging orientation invites people to expand definitions of sex beyond performance into presence, energy, and subtle connection. Originally developed by Claire Rumore, the author of this book.

Communication, Boundaries & Emotional Safety

- **Nonviolent Communication** by Marshall Rosenberg

A helpful framework for expressing needs without blame and building understanding in sensitive conversations.

- **“Speaking From the Heart: 18 Languages for Modern Love”** by Anne Hoddler-Shipp www.themodernlovelanguages.com

An updated and expansive approach that recognizes that Love Languages apply to ALL relationships - not just heterosexual marriage. And there's WAY more than five of them.

For Deeper Relational Work

- **Esther Perel's Podcasts and Books**

- *Where Should We Begin?* podcast: real sessions with couples navigating intimacy challenges
- *Mating in Captivity* (book): a bold look at eroticism inside long-term relationships

- **Cancer And Intimacy Communication and Relationship Coaching and Support for Couples –**
CancerAndIntimacy.com/resources/relationships-communication-support

Our own heart-centered writings and resources for couples navigating intimacy during and after cancer.

Online Tools & Exercises

- **Yes/No/Maybe Lists (see Appendix C)**

Downloadable worksheets to explore sexual interests, boundaries, and desires. (You'll find one in the appendix C of this journal too!)

- **Sensate Focus Exercises**

If you'd like more support with sensate focus, check out [Pause. Breathe. Touch.](#)—a gentle, guided tool to help you reconnect through non-demand, pressure-free touch. It's perfect for slowing down, tuning in, and rebuilding intimacy at your own pace using Sensate Focus.

[The Three Minute Game](#) (from the Wheel of Consent by Betty Martin)

A practice for giving and receiving touch based on clear communication and personal desires.

Instagram & Substack Sex and Intimacy Educators to Follow

(Always check to see whose style, values, and approach align with yours.)

- @cyndidarnell — Cyndi Darnell is a sex therapist and educator who talks openly about libido and relational repair www.cyndidarnell.com
- @enagoski — Emily Nagoski is a sex therapist, researcher, and author who has spent decades studying how to maintain physical connection and desire in long-term relationships www.emilynagoski.com
- @estherperelofficial — Esther Perel is a psychotherapist, NYT Bestselling Author of Mating In Captivity and Podcast Host of the podcast *Where Should We Begin* www.estherperel.com
- @missjaiya — Jaiya is the creator of the Erotic Blueprints framework and author of the book *Your Blueprint For Pleasure* www.missjaiya.com
- @reidmihalko — Reid Mihalko is a prolific and empowering sex educator who teaches adults how to have more self-esteem, confidence, and love. www.reidaboutsex.com
- @askmarciab — Marcia Baczynski is a relationship and consent coach who specializes in teaching people how to ask for (and have!) what they want in sex, relationships, and life. www.askingforwhatyouwant.com
- <https://urbantantrika.substack.com/> — Barbara Carrellas is the founder/author of *Urban Tantra: Sacred Sex for the 21st Century* and author of *Ecstasy is Necessary*. #PleasureIsPower. #StrongerTogether www.barbaracarrellas.com



Want More Support?

- Consider working with a certified sex coach or therapist who understands libido dynamics from all angles—not just performance or dysfunction. You can find one in your area by doing a local search on Google or through AASECT.com
- Explore coaching with the author of this book, Claire Rumore. Find her and other coaches like her at CancerAndIntimacy.com (if you're looking for a tailored, caring, non-judgmental space to explore your desires and relationship patterns during treatment). She offers on-going sessions and programs as well as intensives and personalized retreats.

Remember:

You don't have to fix anything overnight.

You don't have to make yourself smaller or louder.

You *do* get to explore your desires, values, and boundaries with self-respect and relational care.

Start where you are.

Keep going if it feels helpful.

You're not alone in wanting a satisfying, connected, mutually honoring relationship.

Appendix B: Libido Tracker Sheet

“Noticing without judgment, tracking without pressure.”

Use this tracker to check in with yourself each day. There’s no score to keep. There’s no “right” answer.

This is a way to **witness yourself with kindness** and **track patterns over time**—so you can better understand what supports or hinders your connection to desire.

You might fill this out:

- First thing in the morning
- At the end of the day
- Once or twice a week as a reflection practice



Tracker for the Week of: _____

Day	Emotional Energy	Physical Energy	Sensory Curiosity	Libido Signal	Touch Tolerance	Notes or Insights
Monday	☐ low ☐ med ☐ high	☐ low ☐ med ☐ high	☐ open ☐ neutral ☐ avoidant	☐ absent ☐ soft ☐ strong	☐ none ☐ light ☐ medium ☐ high	
Tuesday	☐ low ☐ med ☐ high	☐ low ☐ med ☐ high	☐ open ☐ neutral ☐ avoidant	☐ absent ☐ soft ☐ strong	☐ none ☐ light ☐ medium ☐ high	
Wednesday	☐ low ☐ med ☐ high	☐ low ☐ med ☐ high	☐ open ☐ neutral ☐ avoidant	☐ absent ☐ soft ☐ strong	☐ none ☐ light ☐ medium ☐ high	
Thursday	☐ low ☐ med ☐ high	☐ low ☐ med ☐ high	☐ open ☐ neutral ☐ avoidant	☐ absent ☐ soft ☐ strong	☐ none ☐ light ☐ medium ☐ high	
Friday	☐ low ☐ med ☐ high	☐ low ☐ med ☐ high	☐ open ☐ neutral ☐ avoidant	☐ absent ☐ soft ☐ strong	☐ none ☐ light ☐ medium ☐ high	

Sat	☐ low	☐ low	☐ open	☐ absent	☐ none
	☐ med	☐ med	☐ neutral	☐ soft	☐ light
	☐ high	☐ high	☐ avoidant	☐ strong	☐ medium
					☐ high

Sun	☐ low	☐ low	☐ open	☐ absent	☐ none
	☐ med	☐ med	☐ neutral	☐ soft	☐ light
	☐ high	☐ high	☐ avoidant	☐ strong	☐ medium
					☐ high

Legend & Reflection Notes:

Emotional Energy:

How open or closed do I feel emotionally? (low = numb, flat, or fragile / high = vibrant, expressive, tender)

Physical Energy:

How does my body feel today? (low = fatigued or achy / high = energized, mobile, at ease)

Sensory Curiosity:

Am I open to sensation or more avoidant today? (open = curious or craving / avoidant = overstimulated or shut down)

Libido Signal:

Is there a whisper, a pulse, or a pause in desire today? (absent = nothing at all / soft = light interest / strong = desire is present)

Touch Tolerance:

What level of physical contact feels okay today?

End-of-Week Reflection Questions:

What supported me in feeling connected to myself this week?

Were there any patterns or surprising changes?

What do I want to offer myself next week—grace, space, sensual play, rest, exploration?

Appendix C: Yes / No / Maybe List

A tool for discovering what feels good, what doesn't, and what's open for exploration

This list is not a test—it's a **conversation with yourself** (and optionally with a partner). There are no right answers. Everything you check or skip is valid. The goal is not to have a full “yes” column. The goal is **to hear yourself clearly**.

You can complete this list more than once—what’s “no” today might become “maybe” in the future. Or not. That’s okay.

Use it to:

- Rebuild intimacy after illness, trauma, or change
 - Express needs and boundaries with clarity
 - Invite more pleasure into your life, on your terms
-

How to Use It

Mark each item with:

 **Yes** – I feel open, curious, or excited about this

 **No** – This doesn't feel good, safe, or aligned right now

 **Maybe** – I'm unsure, open to exploring gently, or want to revisit later

You can also add notes, conditions, or preferences—for example:

“Only if I feel emotionally safe” or “Only with clothes on” or “Only when I'm not tired.”

Sensory & Emotional Connection

Experience	Yes	No	Maybe	Notes
Eye contact	☐	☐	☐	
Holding hands	☐	☐	☐	
Cuddling / spooning	☐	☐	☐	
Being held or rocked	☐	☐	☐	
Deep, slow breathing together	☐	☐	☐	
Sharing a bath or shower	☐	☐	☐	
Emotional vulnerability or storytelling	☐	☐	☐	
Meditating or resting in silence together	☐	☐	☐	

Touch & Physical Closeness

Experience	Yes	No	Maybe	Notes
Back rub or massage	☐	☐	☐	
Scalp or hair touch	☐	☐	☐	
Kissing (cheek, lips, neck)	☐	☐	☐	
Lying next to someone without touching	☐	☐	☐	
Exploring touch with clothes on	☐	☐	☐	
Touching genitals (solo or partner)	☐	☐	☐	
Receiving oral touch	☐	☐	☐	
Giving oral touch	☐	☐	☐	
Mutual masturbation	☐	☐	☐	

Sensual & Erotic Exploration

Experience	Yes	No	Maybe	Notes
Using massage oils or lotions	☐	☐	☐	
Watching or listening to something erotic	☐	☐	☐	
Using a vibrator or toy	☐	☐	☐	
Roleplay or fantasy storytelling	☐	☐	☐	
Light bondage or sensation play	☐	☐	☐	
Sensate focus (non-goal touch)	☐	☐	☐	
Intercourse	☐	☐	☐	
Erotic audio or guided pleasure meditations	☐	☐	☐	

Relational Boundaries & Preferences

Boundary / Need	Yes	No	Maybe	Notes
I want to be asked before being touched	☐	☐	☐	
I prefer slow build-up to intimacy	☐	☐	☐	
I want aftercare or check-ins post-intimacy	☐	☐	☐	
I want to express needs without shame	☐	☐	☐	
I want intimacy that doesn't involve genitals	☐	☐	☐	
I want spaciousness to change my mind	☐	☐	☐	
I want to laugh, cry, or be silent without pressure	☐	☐	☐	



Add Your Own

What else belongs on your Yes / No / Maybe list?

- _____
- _____
- _____

Reminder:

You don't have to earn your yeses. You don't have to explain your no's.

You get to be exactly where you are—without apology.

We wish you the very best and are honored to be part of your journey!

Warmly,

Claire

Claire Rumore and the Cancer & Intimacy Team

www.CancerAndIntimacy.com