

Mikveh use during cancer treatment can pose a number of challenges: • There may be medical concerns about the safety of immersion. • A woman may feel weak and or exhausted, making both preparations and immersion difficult. • A woman may not be ready for intercourse, physically or emotionally. • A woman may look different as a result of chemo or surgery, and may not be comfortable with a stranger watching her immerse. • Chatzitza questions may arise.

The following halachic points and recommendations may help alleviate these challenges.

Tevila

רמ"א, יורה דעה קטז:ה ...יזהר מכל דברים המביאים לידי סכנה, כי סכנתא חמירא מאיסורא...

Rema, YD 116:5 ...One should be careful of all things that cause danger, because danger is more grave than transgression...

- Safety first! A woman should check in with her doctor for guidance and check out the hygienic practices at her mikveh. For suppressed immunity, she can arrange to be the first appointment after the water is treated.
- A single dip is permissible (Shulchan Aruch YD 200:1), customs to dip more can be suspended in time of need.
- Another woman can provide physical support, as long as she first wets her hand in the mikveh and keeps a loose grip.

שולחן ערוך יורה דעה קצח:כח לא תאחוז בה חבירתה בידיה בשעת טבילה אלא אם כן רפתה ידה...ואם הדיחה ידיה במים תחלה. שרי.

Shulchan Aruch YD 198:28 Her friend should only hold onto her during immersion if she loosens her hands...and if she wets her hands first in the [mikveh] water, that is permitted..

Daytime tevila (day 8+) may be permitted when nights are consistently more difficult for a woman. In this case, it is customary not to have relations until nightfall.

שולחן ערוך יורה דעה קצז:ד היכא דאיכא אונס, כגון שיראה לטבול בלילה מחמת צינה או פחד גנבים וכיוצא בו, או שסוגרין שערי העיר, יכולה לטבול בשמיני מבעוד יום הגה: ומכל מקום לא תשמש אפילו בשמיני עד הלילה...

Shulchan Aruch YD 197:4 In a case of forced circumstances—for example if it is too cold at night or there is a fear of thieves or the like, or they close the gate of the city—she can immerse on the 8th day while there is still daylight. **Rema:** And in any case she should not have relations even on the eighth day until the night...

Adjusting Mikvah Prep

- Many preparations (e.g., preparing nails) can be done in advance. Rinse off and comb hair close to immersion and be sure to inspect oneself visually right beforehand. If hair is falling out or fragile, ask a halachic question prior to combing.

שולחן ערוך יורה דעה קצט:א צריכה האשה לעיין בעצמה ובבשרה ובודקת כל גופה סמוך לטבילתה, שלא יהא עליה שום דבר מיאוס שחוצץ; ותחוף כל גופה ותשטוף במים חמים בשעת חפיפת גופה ושערה.

Shulchan Aruch YD 199:1 A woman must inspect herself, and check her whole body, close to her immersion, that there not be anything distasteful on her that is a barrier. And she should clean her whole body and wash with warm water when she prepares her body and hair.

- When skin is too sensitive for bathing, a shower suffices. (Even using wipes may suffice.)

Badei HaShulchan 199:17 The basic law is that it suffices for water to spill on her... Still, women have taken on the practice of bathing in a tub...However, a woman who is pregnant and for health reasons is prevented from entering a bath, it seems that it suffices for her to shower.

- If there is one spot that is particularly painful to wash, consult a halachic authority about covering it during a shower and relying on visual inspection afterwards.

Delaying Tevila or Relations

- Sexual intercourse is a mitzva in the context of marriage, including a biblical obligation on the husband. Intercourse on mikveh night is encouraged but not obligatory.

שולחן ערוך אבן העזר עו"א אסור לאדם למנוע מאשתו עונתה

Shulchan Aruch EH 76:11 It is forbidden for a man to withhold sexual relations from his wife

Responsa Noda BiYehuda (Second ed.), YD 117 On the night of immersion, even if we say there is a 'mitzva', we do not find it is an obligation

- Immersion or intimacy can be postponed when sick for physical or emotional reasons.

Responsa Iggerot Moshe EH 1:102 ...Regarding the essence of the mitzva of ona...when the woman is the one who does not want intercourse, the mitzva does not apply at all...

Responsa Iggerot Moshe OC 4:75 It is obvious that when it is difficult for a woman to accept intercourse she is not obligated

- A couple can agree to delay immersion. However, even when sexual relations are ruled out, immersion allows for other forms of physical intimacy, also considered a mitzva.

Taharat Ha-bayit II 14, Mishmeret Ha-tahara 2 ...With the agreement of the husband and the wife, it is permissible to push off immersion for some days when there is some reason for it.

Responsa Shevet HaLevi 2:101 If she cannot have intercourse with her husband for some reason, it still seems to be a mitzva to immerse for other forms of intimacy...

Mikveh Attendant

- The attendant's primary role is to check that the woman's entire body, including all of her hair is fully immersed. A woman can request her attendant to wait outside the room until she enters the water, can decline other help, and can choose her own attendant (via Sharsheret).

שולחן ערוך יורה דעה קצח:מ צריך לעמוד על גבה יהודית גדולה יותר מ"ב שנה ויום אחד בשעה שהיא טובלת
שתראה שלא ישאר משער ראשה צף על פני המים;

Shulchan Aruch YD 198:40 When a woman immerses, another woman, over 12 years, must watch over her to ensure that there isn't even one hair floating above the water.

- If a woman uses a loose, non-elastic hairnet (cutting the band to keep it loose) or her hair is very short, she can ask about forgoing a mikveh attendant.