

Are lesbian and bisexual women at higher risk for breast cancer?

Simply being a lesbian or bisexual woman does **not** put you at higher risk for breast cancer. However, lesbian and bisexual women as a group may have higher rates of some breast cancer risk factors than heterosexual women.

How can you find a lesbian and bisexual positive health care provider?

- ask friends for recommendations
- call providers and ask questions such as:

"Do you have other gay, lesbian or bisexual patients?"

"Is your staff trained in lesbian and bisexual women's health?"

- check out the waiting room for any lesbian or bisexual symbols or literature
- look for patient forms that use inclusive language, such as "partner"

Sherbourne Health Centre offers primary health care services for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and transsexual communities in Toronto. Services are offered in a wide range of languages, through telephone translation.

Sherbourne Health Centre
www.sherbourne.on.ca



Rainbow Health Ontario
www.rainbowhealthontario.ca



Rainbow Health Ontario



For more information:

Please visit us online at

www.RainbowHealthOntario.ca to:

- download this brochure in French or English
- find other LGBT health resources
- purchase copies of Making Us Visible materials

This brochure was created by the volunteer Resource Development Group of the Making Us Visible project.

Making Us Visible was a partnership between Sherbourne Health Centre, Ontario Breast Cancer Community Research Initiative, Gilda's Club Greater Toronto, Willow Breast Cancer Support and Resource Services, and the Metropolitan Community Church of Toronto.



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This project was made possible with the generous support of the Canadian Breast Cancer Foundation, Ontario Chapter.



Busting Out: Breast Health for Lesbian & Bisexual Women



What is breast health about?

Being aware that your breasts change naturally throughout your life:

- growth of breasts at puberty
- swelling, lumpiness or tenderness before menstrual periods
- breasts become larger and firmer during pregnancy and breastfeeding
- breasts become less firm and dense at menopause



Choosing to modify your breasts if it helps you feel good about yourself:

- binding
- nipple piercing
- tattooing
- surgery to make your breasts larger or smaller

Getting to know your breasts:

- know how your breasts usually look and feel
- try feeling your breasts while bathing or showering, looking at them in a mirror, or examining them while lying down
- explore what your breasts look and feel like at different times of the month

Visiting a health care provider if you notice any of the following changes:

- change in shape or size of your breast
- thickening or swelling
- lumps in breast or armpit
- discomfort or pain in one breast
- persistent breast pain after your period
- puckering or dimpling of skin
- rash, redness, irritation or scaly skin
- change in the nipple
- nipple becomes inverted
- nipple discharge



Most breast changes are not cancerous.

What is breast screening?

Breast screening is the regular examination of your breasts to detect breast cancer at an early stage.

Studies have shown that lesbian and bisexual women are less likely to participate in breast screening than straight women.



Breast screening methods include:

• Clinical Breast Exam

This is a physical exam by a health care provider, which can be done for women of all ages.

• Mammogram

This is a low dose x-ray of the breast.

If you are under 49:

There is no proven benefit to screening mammograms for women in this age group. This is because pre-menopausal women tend to have denser breast tissue which makes it harder to detect changes.

If you are 50-69:

This is the only age group where research has demonstrated a benefit to screening mammograms in terms of reducing mortality from breast cancer by up to 30%. However, some studies show little or no benefit.

If you are over 70:

Little evidence exists on the effectiveness of screening mammograms for women over 70.

Mammograms include low dose radiation exposure and can cause discomfort.

Talking to your health care provider about mammograms can help you weigh the risks and benefits based on your individual situation.

For all screening methods, you have the right to further investigate each option and decide your course of action.

What are the risk factors for breast cancer?

A risk factor is anything that increases one's chance of getting a disease. Having a risk factor does not necessarily mean you will get breast cancer. Some women who are diagnosed with breast cancer have no identifiable risk factors other than being a woman.



Risk factors for breast cancer include:

- being a woman
- increasing age
- family history of breast & related cancers
- previous abnormal breast biopsies
- radiation to the chest area
- early menstruation/late menopause
- hormone replacement therapy for over 5 years
- not having any biological children or giving birth to first child after age 30
- not getting enough physical activity
- being overweight
- diet low in fruit & vegetables, high in saturated fats
- high alcohol consumption

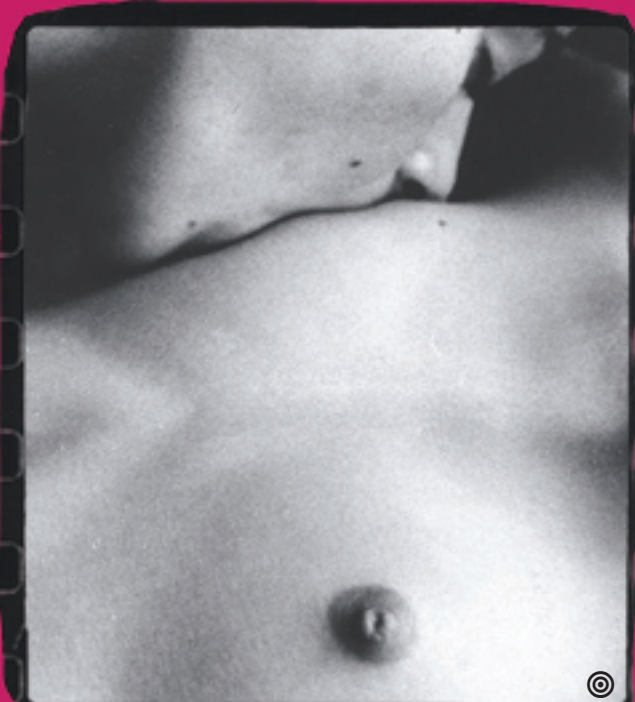
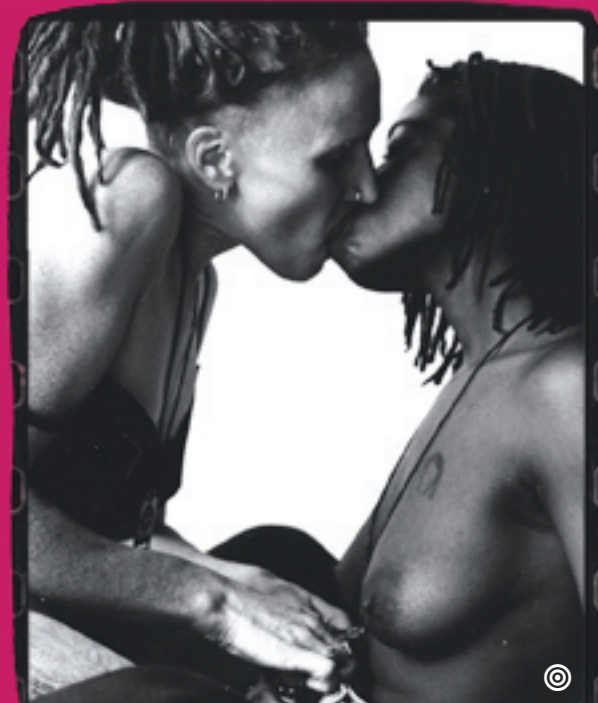
If you have concerns or questions about any of these risk factors, please talk to a health care provider.

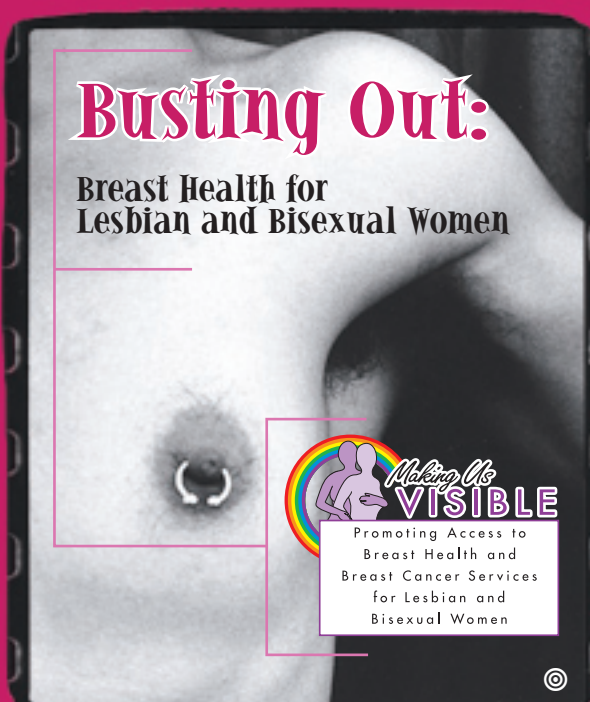
How can you reduce your risk?

We don't yet know how to prevent breast cancer. However, some of the steps we can take to improve our health generally may reduce our risk of breast cancer:

- be physically active
- maintain a healthy body weight
- eat lots of fruit & vegetables (5-10 servings per day)
- limit alcohol intake to 1 drink or less per day
- limit intake of saturated fats, such as animal fats & tropical oils
- avoid exposure to cancer causing substances such as pesticides & other toxins







Busting Out:

Breast Health for
Lesbian and Bisexual Women



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