

SEXUAL HEALTH

If you're having sex, there are ways to do it safely so you're protecting yourself and others. You should feel safe, empowered, and have the kind of sex you want. You should never be pushed into anything that you are uncomfortable with.

If you choose to transition medically you may experience changes to your sex drive. It may take a bit of time to get used to some of the changes happening to you and your body.

Sexually transmitted infections (STIs) can affect anyone. Not everyone will show symptoms so it's important to test regularly and after each new sexual partner. The only way to know your STI status is to get tested.

A person's risk of exposure to STIs and blood-borne viruses (BBVs) depends on the body parts and fluids involved in sexual activity with another person, not a person's identity. When discussing your sexual health with a health care provider, make sure to describe your sexual behaviour, ask about the risks of specific sex acts, and check in about the types of STI testing they recommend. Most STIs are easily treated.

You should also get tested for HIV annually, or more often if you change partners, have casual or new partners or have been diagnosed with an STI.

Consider the following recommendations to reduce your risk of STIs and BBVs to you and your partner(s):

- Negotiate safety with your partner(s) and discuss acceptable levels of risk for everyone involved.
- Use barriers such as gloves, dental dams, and condoms with body parts and sex toys; many sexual health clinics and other health care facilities offer these free-of-charge.
- Clean sex toys before sharing with others.
- Avoid oral sex if either of you has any cuts or sores in the mouth or on the lips.
- Use a condom and/or a dental dam for oral sex acts, to prevent orally transmitted STIs.
- Be aware that the use of alcohol and drugs before or during sex, sharing needles, and some BDSM/kink activities may involve a greater level of risk and needs to include negotiation.

- Get vaccinated against hepatitis A and B.
- If you are HIV negative, ask your health care provider whether PrEP (pre-exposure prophylaxis) or PEP (post-exposure prophylaxis) would be helpful.
- Some people taking hormones may still be able to get pregnant or impregnate their partner. To reduce the risk of unplanned pregnancy, use a condom, other barrier method, or speak to your health care provider.
- If you're not in a long-term, mutually monogamous relationship, schedule regular screenings for HIV and STIs. Share any other health concerns you might have with your doctor as well. Early diagnosis and treatment help promote long-term health.

RELATIONSHIP SAFETY AND HEALTH

Healthy relationships are based on mutual respect, open communication, and make you feel happy, supported and loved.

Intimate partner violence is physical or sexual violence, stalking, or emotional or psychological abuse by a current or former partner. If your partner treats you in a way that makes you feel unsafe or bad about yourself, depressed or anxious; if your partner harasses and follows you; controls your money, where you go and who you see; if your partner threatens you; if your partners hits, punches or kicks you or forces you to engage in sexual activity against your will - don't suffer in silence.

In addition to experiencing violence in intimate relationships, trans and non-binary people can be the targets of transphobic hate crimes or violence and discrimination in their communities and workplaces and even within 2SLGBTQ communities.

If you feel unsafe or have experienced abuse or violence, you can seek support from a health care provider, a counsellor, or a crisis line. If there is any possibility that your partner(s) would access the same support services as you, especially in a small community, let the service provider know.

Find support and help

Ontario Victim Support Line
1-888-579-2888


Assaulted Women's Helpline
awhl.org
Toll-free: 1-866-863-0511

ADDITIONAL HEALTH AND WELLNESS RESOURCES

Visit rainbowhealthontario.ca/2slgbtq-health-resources or scan this code with your mobile device:



This brochure was created by Rainbow Health Ontario (RHO). A program of Sherbourne Health, RHO creates opportunities for the healthcare system to better serve 2SLGBTQ communities.

 RainbowHealthOntario.ca
 twitter.com/RainbowHealthOn
 facebook.com/RainbowHealthOntario

Health care providers can visit Learn.RainbowHealthOntario.ca to find out more about our courses designed to increase competency in serving 2SLGBTQ service users.



about trans and non-binary health

Trans and non-binary individuals have many of the same health risks and needs as the general population, but they may face unique challenges surrounding their health and wellbeing.

Your health is influenced by many factors beyond gender identity or expression.

Discrimination and negative attitudes affect trans and non-binary individuals when seeking health care.

Black and other racialized people, Indigenous, and disabled people may experience additional barriers and forms of discrimination.

This brochure outlines some of the health issues of concern for trans and non-binary individuals.

TAKE CHARGE OF YOUR HEALTH

Being healthy means taking care of your physical, emotional, sexual, psychological, and spiritual needs. It can be difficult to come out about your gender or medical history to your health care provider. But being your authentic self can promote good health and wellbeing.

Don't delay or avoid seeking services because you had negative experiences, or are concerned about discrimination, stigma, confidentiality, your immigration status, or other factors. Getting regular check-ups and care from a trans-positive, trans-competent care provider is important to stay healthy.

TIPS TO IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF HEALTH CARE YOU RECEIVE

- Educate yourself about possible health concerns, risks, and options for trans and non-binary people. Your race or ethnicity may also increase your risk for certain diseases and conditions.
- Seek out health care providers and spaces that are trans-positive.
- Visit potential providers and ask questions. You have every right to know what training and experience your provider has in trans-competent care.
- Notice whether the intake and medical history questionnaires offer inclusive choices for gender identity and/or asks for name/pronouns that may be different from your health records.
- Listen for how the provider speaks with you and whether you are encouraged to talk about your concerns. If your provider seems open but uninformed, you can suggest Rainbow Health Ontario's courses designed to increase 2SLGBTQ competency for health care providers.
- Bring a support person with you to your appointment.
- If you feel safe, identify yourself as trans and/or non-binary and be open about discussing the issues that concern you so your provider can better understand how to help you stay healthy.
- If you do not feel comfortable with a provider, look for another.

FINDING A HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONAL

Ask other 2SLGBTQ people for recommendations about health care providers and services. Several large cities now have health care centres that provide comprehensive, 2SLGBTQ-competent care. If there are few providers in your region, look into accessing providers via the Ontario Telemedicine Network (OTN).

RHO Service Provider Directory
rainbowhealthontario.ca/lgbt2sq-health/service-provider-directory/

HEALTH RISKS ASSOCIATED WITH USING ALCOHOL, TOBACCO, DRUGS

Substances such as drugs, alcohol and tobacco are sometimes used to cope with homophobia/transphobia, discrimination, and depression. Tobacco use can lead to serious health problems. Smoking can put a surgical patient at a higher risk for experiencing dangerous blood clots, ulcers and infections post-procedure, and delay wound healing. If you are considering surgery, discuss your substance use with your health care providers.

If you use tobacco, alcohol or drugs, learning about the effects and side effects can help make your use safer. There are many types of harm reduction and cessation programs, and your health care provider can help you choose one that's right for you.

CANCER SCREENING

Screening can stop cancer before it starts or can detect cancer in its early stages, at which point it is more treatable and/or curable.

Who should get screened?

- Individuals should be screened for cancer based on the organs that they have (e.g. prostate, testicles, cervix, breasts, colon), rather than based their gender identity or sexual orientation/practices.
- Anyone with breast tissue is at risk for breast cancer and should be screened according to guidelines. Make sure you are enrolled in the Ontario Breast Screening Program, which may not happen automatically depending on your gender on file.
- Regular screenings for cervical, prostate, testicular and colon cancer may be recommended based on age and risk; screening

for prostate or testicular cancer may be considered on a case-by-case basis.

- Some providers recommend that people who have anal sex get regular anal pap screening, though this is not currently widely available.

Speak to your general practitioner about cancer screening. You have the right to receive screening that is appropriate for you. If you don't have a general practitioner, there are some screenings that are available without a referral.

YOUR EMOTIONAL AND MENTAL HEALTH

Chronic stress, violence and discrimination can damage your self-esteem, identity, and self-acceptance. As a result, trans and non-binary individuals may experience higher rates of mental distress, depression, anxiety, suicide, and substance use when compared to the general population. Rejection and stigma can affect physical health, leading to heart disease and impaired memory recall. Stigma can encourage ostracized individuals to avoid social encounters, avoid healthcare professionals, and engage in risk-taking behaviours like unsafe sex.

Stress and discrimination may be heightened if you have experienced other trauma, if you identify as Indigenous, Black, racialized, or disabled.

MAINTAINING AND IMPROVING EMOTIONAL AND MENTAL HEALTH

Having a supportive group of friends and family members (whether family of origin or chosen family) who understand and affirm your sexuality is often key to successfully dealing with the stress of day-to-day life and maintaining good mental health.

You can also find support by:

- Getting involved in community, social, athletic, religious, peer support and other groups.
- Exploring various coping strategies to deal with stresses and manage self-care such as meditation, physical activity, and enjoyable activities.
- Seeking mental health counselling and support groups that are sensitive to the

needs of trans and non-binary people can be especially useful if you are coming to terms with your sexual orientation, gender identity, or are experiencing depression, anxiety, or other mental health challenges.

BODY IMAGE AND HEALTH

Body image, or the way that you view your body, impacts people of all shapes, sizes, colors, sexualities, and genders. Some trans and non-binary people may have a negative body image due to discomfort with their physical bodies. This may lead to excessive dieting and exercise to achieve their desired gender expression. Trans and non-binary people who take hormones often gain weight and this may also lead to dieting or other changes in behaviour. Nutrition, weight, and other physical appearance concerns can become unhealthy if they make you feel depressed, cause physical harm or result in eating disorders, or put you at further risk for chronic health diseases such as diabetes, high blood pressure and heart disease. Healthy bodies come in all shapes and sizes.

IF YOU ARE THINKING ABOUT TRANSITIONING

Transition itself can be stressful. Studies show that trans and non-binary people are most vulnerable from the time they decide to transition until they begin the process.

There is no one way to transition and there are many options for social and/or medical transitioning. Not everyone who socially transitions wants to medically transition. Do what is right for you in a timeframe that is comfortable for you.

The main goal of medical transition is to facilitate physical changes to affirm your gender identity. If you choose to take transition-related hormones and/or have surgery, there are several options and things to consider such as cost (if you have health insurance, what is covered and what is not), side effects, recovery plan, risks and more. Knowledgeable primary care providers and/or mental health providers are good resources to speak to about goals, options and transition plan.