

BEING HEALTHY

Although there have been significant improvements in human rights for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and queer (LGBTQ) people, their needs are often overlooked in our health and social service systems. We all deserve to be healthy, regardless of our age, race, ethnicity, income, ability, sexual orientation, gender expression or gender identity.

Being healthy means taking care of our physical, emotional, sexual, psychological and spiritual needs.

GETTING GOOD HEALTH CARE

For gay men and other men who have sex with men, getting good health care can sometimes be a challenge. Health care providers may be homophobic or they may not know much about your health concerns. This can make it tough to come out to your health care provider. But it is important for everyone to go for regular check-ups and to get professional and proactive care. Here are some suggestions to improve the quality of your health care:

- Ask other LGBTQ people about their health care providers and who they recommend, or check RHO's service directory
- Check out the office space and look for LGBTQ friendly posters, brochures, magazines or other signs of a LGBTQ positive environment
- Listen for how the provider speaks with you and whether you are encouraged to talk about your concerns in a culturally sensitive and nonjudgmental manner
- If you feel safe, come out to your provider so that you can be open about discussing the issues that are of concern to you and they can better understand how to help you stay healthy or get better
- If you do not feel comfortable with a provider, look for another so that you can get the best health care possible
- If there are not many providers in your region, look into accessing providers elsewhere who can connect to you via the Ontario Telemedicine Network (OTN)

HEALTH & WELLNESS RESOURCES

Gay Men's Sexual Health Alliance
www.gmsh.ca

Health Initiative for Men
www.checkhimout.ca

ASO411
www.aso411.ca

Canadian Cancer Society
Smokers' Helpline - 1 877 513 5333
Cancer Screening: cancer.on.ca/getscreened
www.clear-the-air.ca

Lesbian Gay Bi Trans Youth Line
1-800-268-9688 • www.youthline.ca

**Rainbow Services at the
Centre for Addiction and Mental Health**
416.535.8501

Rainbow Health Ontario
www.RainbowHealthOntario.ca
Rainbow Health Ontario (RHO) is a province-wide program that works to improve the health and well-being of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and queer people in Ontario through education, research, consultation and the development of healthy public policy.

To download or order, visit:
www.rainbowhealthontario.ca

CONTACT US:

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To learn more, please visit:
www.RainbowHealthOntario.ca

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HEALTH INFORMATION FOR GAY MEN AND
OTHER MEN WHO HAVE SEX WITH MEN TO
WHOM THIS MAY APPLY



Rainbow Health Ontario
Santé arc-en-ciel Ontario

Because LGBTQ health matters

www.RainbowHealthOntario.ca

Gay men and men who have sex with men (MSM) have many of the same health needs as the general population, but may also have specific health care needs. Gay men and other men who have sex with men may also experience negative attitudes and discrimination when seeking health care. It can be difficult to find knowledgeable and respectful health care services, but things are improving as Rainbow Health Ontario works with providers to increase capacity to deliver quality care. This brochure outlines some of the health issues that are of concern to gay men and MSM.

EMOTIONAL & MENTAL HEALTH

Mental health is shaped by a sense of self-worth, the level of stress that people are subjected to, and the inclusiveness of their workplace and community.

- Gay men and MSM experience higher rates of depression, anxiety, and suicide than the general population
 - This can be due to internalized, societal and institutional homo/bi/transphobia
 - These stresses can profoundly affect self-esteem, identity and self-acceptance
- Violence and micro-aggression can further contribute to mental distress and challenges with coming out to friends, family and society

Finding support and help:

- You might want to talk to family and friends or peers in a support group
- Explore various coping strategies to deal with stresses and manage self-care such as meditation, physical activity and making time for activities you enjoy

ALCOHOL & DRUG USE

- Gay men are more likely to use alcohol and other recreational drugs than heterosexual men
- Alcohol or drugs are sometimes used to cope with homo/transphobia, discrimination and depression
- If you use drugs, learning about the effects and side effects can help make your use safer
- Ask yourself whether your drug use is affecting your health, relationships, job, studies or finances
- Consider whether your use is leading you to take risks, sexual or otherwise, that you wouldn't take if you were sober
- There are many types of harm reduction programs and your health care provider can help you choose one that's right for you

TOBACCO USE & SMOKING

Research indicates that LGBTQ communities use tobacco at rates that are two to three times higher than those of the general population.

Reasons for this include:

- Used as a coping mechanism for high levels of stress
- Tobacco industry marketing specifically to LGBTQ communities
- Desire to belong to a group
- LGBTQ people might not see themselves represented in mainstream anti-smoking campaigns

If you are interested in reducing tobacco use or making a quit attempt, there are LGBTQ friendly services and resources available in Ontario:

www.clear-the-air.ca

CANCER

Cancer screening rates are low among LGBTQ communities. Screening means getting checked for cancer before you have any symptoms. Screening can stop cancer before it starts or if found, treat it early so that intervention works.

- Smoking increases the risk for lung cancer, and may increase the risk of other types of cancer
- People who have anal sex are at higher risk for contracting HPV, which can lead to anal cancer
- Some providers recommend that people who have anal sex get regular anal pap screening
- Regular screenings for prostate, testicular and colon cancer may be recommended based on age and risk

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

BODY IMAGE

- Healthy bodies come in all shapes and sizes
- Gay men may excessively diet or exercise in order to achieve community standards of physical beauty
- Some gay men's communities celebrate large bodies which may put them at risk for diabetes, high blood pressure and heart disease
- Nutrition and weight concerns can become unhealthy if they make you feel depressed or cause physical harm

RELATIONSHIP HEALTH

Intimate partner violence does occur in relationships between men. Abuse between men is often dismissed, misunderstood or trivialized. Your health care provider may not ask you about your relationship(s), but you can speak to them if you have any worries about your interactions with your partner(s).

Signs of intimate partner violence may include:

- Your partner gets jealous; makes fun of you; threatens to "out" you or harm you; misgenders you; tries to control your activities, finances, or other relationships; withholds access to medication; pressures or forces you to have sex; is physically violent; or acts in other ways that make you feel unsafe
- Your partner uses one or more parts of your identity (like your gender identity, sexual orientation, race, class, age, culture, religion, spirituality, immigration status, HIV status, body size, appearance, etc.) to manipulate, control, or shame you
- You feel depressed, anxious, angry, afraid, guilty, ashamed or suicidal

Signs of a healthy relationship may include:

- Regular, open communication about the needs and desires of all partners
- Enthusiastic consent in sexual relations and other aspects of the relationship(s)
- Respect for each partner's independence and identities
- You feel joy and happiness, and supported and loved

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 staff know.

SEXUAL HEALTH

A person's risk of exposure to sexually transmitted infections (STI) and blood-borne viruses (BBV) depends on the body parts and fluids involved in sexual activity with another person, rather than a person's identity. When discussing your sexual health with a health care provider, make sure to describe your sexual behaviour and ask about the risks of specific sex acts in order to avoid any assumptions.

To reduce your risk of STIs and BBVs:

- Negotiate safety with your partner(s), and what are the acceptable levels of risk for all persons involved
- Use barriers such as gloves, 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 a partner
- Be aware that the use of alcohol and drugs before or during sex, sharing needles, a few BDSM/kink activities, and some sex work may involve a greater level of risk and need 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 for you for HIV prevention

Some trans people taking hormones may still be able to get pregnant or inseminate their partner. To reduce the risk of unplanned pregnancy, use a condom or other barrier method, or ask your health care provider.

