

Being Healthy

We all deserve to be healthy, regardless of our age, race, income, sexual orientation or gender identity.

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

For transsexual and transgender people, this can be a challenge given the stress of dealing with prejudice and discrimination.

But being trans is a wonderful, positive experience for many people and gender identity can be a source of pride and celebration.

Many people get healthier after coming out and transitioning as they feel more in touch with their bodies and more in control of their lives.

Some things that can help you to be healthy include:

- ✦ Accepting and loving yourself for who you are.
- ✦ Coming out if you feel safe and comfortable.
- ✦ Finding personal strengths, other people, and activities that make you feel good about yourself.
- ✦ Connecting with others who support you in the trans and queer communities.
- ✦ Figuring out what may be stressful for you and learning the best ways to deal with stress.
- ✦ Learning about your body so that you know what to do to take care of yourself.

Getting Good Health Care

For transsexual and transgender people, getting good health care can be hard. Health care providers may be transphobic or they may not know much about your health concerns. This can make it tough to come out about your gender identity to your health care provider, and some trans people may just avoid seeking health care altogether. But it is important to get regular check-ups and to get professional help when something is wrong. Here are some suggestions to improve the quality of your health care:

- ✦ Ask other trans people about their health care providers and who they recommend, or check local queer newspapers and community directories for advice.
- ✦ Visit potential providers and ask questions about their training and experience with trans health issues.
- ✦ Check out the office space and look for LGBTT-friendly posters, brochures, magazines or other signs of a LGBTT-positive environment.
- ✦ Listen for how the provider talks 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 your provider can better understand how to help you stay healthy or get better.
- ✦ If you do not feel comfortable with a provider, shop around to find a place where you can be yourself so that you can get the best health care possible.

Health & Wellness Resources

Canadian Cancer Society

Cancer information and support services.
Cancer Info Service - 1 888 939 3333
Smokers' Helpline - 1 877 513 5333
www.cancer.ca

Canadian Professional Association for Transgender Health

A national trans health organization.
www.cpath.ca

Canadian Rainbow Health Coalition

A national LGBT health organization.
www.rainbowhealth.ca

519 Trans Programmes

Information and resources for TS/TG people.
www.the519.org/programs/trans/index.shtml

Lesbian Gay Bi Trans Youth Line

A toll-free Ontario-wide peer-support phone line for LGBTT youth
1-800-268-9688 • www.youthline.ca

Rainbow Health Ontario

A province-wide program providing LGBT health information, consultation, training, research and policy services.
www.RainbowHealthOntario.ca

Rainbow Services at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health

Counselling for drug and alcohol concerns. Tel. 416.535.8501 ext.6781

TRANS Pulse

An Ontario-wide community-based health and wellness research project.
www.transpulse.ca

Transgender Health Program

Information from the Vancouver Coastal Health program.
www.vch.ca/transhealth

Let's Talk About Trans Health

Health information for transsexual and transgender people



Rainbow Health Ontario

To download or purchase go to www.rainbowhealthontario.ca

Trans people often experience negative attitudes and discrimination when seeking health care. It can be very difficult to find knowledgeable and respectful health care services. While most of the health needs of trans people are the same as everybody else, the impact of transphobia means that you may experience these health needs differently. If you take hormones or have had surgery, then you may also face a specific set of health issues that need to be addressed. It is important that both you and your health care provider are aware of your health care needs. This brochure outlines some of the health issues that are of concern to transgender and transsexual people.

NUTRITION, FITNESS & WEIGHT

Many transgender and transsexual people have a negative body image due to discomfort with the gender of their physical bodies. Some trans people may diet or exercise to make physical changes as they transition to their desired gender. While no studies have been done, it seems likely that trans people would be affected by cultural body stereotypes and this may lead to unhealthy behaviours such as compulsive exercising, eating disorders or injecting silicone. Trans people who take hormones often gain weight and this may also lead to dieting or other changes in behaviour. Just like everyone else, overweight trans people are at higher risk for a number of health problems, including diabetes, high blood pressure and heart disease. Also, trans men on testosterone may be at increased risk for heart disease due to a shift in their bodies' weight distribution. While there's nothing wrong with wanting to look good or having a healthy body image, nutrition and weight concerns can become unhealthy if they make you feel depressed or cause physical harm. Try to educate yourself about good nutrition and develop a program of regular exercise that includes breaks and fun activities.

CANCER

Transgender and transsexual people's risks for cancer are not well understood. Negative experiences with the healthcare system lead many trans people to avoid regular physical exams and routine screening tests. This puts trans people at a higher risk of late diagnosis and treatment of any cancer. Trans men who are taking hormones may be at higher risk for breast and ovarian cancer as extra testosterone in the body can be converted into estrogen which can cause health problems. Trans men are also at higher risk for polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS) which is a hormonal condition that can cause cysts to grow in the ovaries. Trans men with PCOS may be at higher risk for endometrial cancer and breast cancer. Trans women who are taking hormones may be at an increased risk for breast cancer and prostate cancer due to an increase in estrogen and a decrease in testosterone. Higher rates of smoking tobacco also increase the risk for lung cancer for both trans men and trans women and may add to the risk for other cancers.

It is important for you to assess your personal risk factors and to have routine screenings. Both trans men and trans women with breast tissue need to be screened for breast cancer. Pap smears are recommended for trans men who are at risk for cervical cancer and prostate cancer screening is recommended for trans women.

ALCOHOL & DRUG USE

There is little information about the rates of alcohol and drug use among trans people, but the evidence suggests that substance abuse is a serious concern for some trans people. It is believed that trans people may be more likely to use alcohol and other drugs compared to the general population. In transgender and transsexual communities, alcohol or drugs may be used to cope with transphobia, discrimination and depression. If you use drugs, learning about them can help make your use safer. If you're concerned about your drug or alcohol use, ask yourself whether it is affecting your health, relationships, job or finances. Also, 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 alcohol and drug programs and your health care provider can help you choose one that's right for you.

TOBACCO & SMOKING

While there is almost no research on tobacco use in transgender and transsexual communities, high smoking rates among lesbian and gay people suggest that trans people may also smoke more than the general population. In 2007, 16% of adults over 15 in Ontario were current smokers while a recent Toronto LGBTTT study found a smoking rate of 34% for both trans women and trans men. This might be due to high levels of social stress, lack of support, and high rates of poverty, homelessness and depression. Trans people who smoke cigarettes are at increased risk for developing lung cancer, heart disease, and emphysema. There are also other specific health risks as smoking increases the risk of blood clots in trans women who take estrogen, and it increases the risk of heart disease in trans men who take testosterone. Smoking also slows down healing after any surgery and increases the chance of scarring. While quitting smoking is not easy, there are programs and resources to help you be successful.

EMOTIONAL & MENTAL HEALTH

There are many reasons why people may develop emotional or psychological problems during their lives, but trans people face particular challenges dealing with gender identity issues and living in a transphobic world. Negative attitudes, discrimination and violence can contribute to mental and emotional distress for transgender and transsexual people. Transition itself can be stressful with many barriers to be overcome. Coming out can also be emotionally tough with many trans people having to deal with rejection from family and friends. These stressors have a profound impact on trans people's self-esteem and self-identities, and studies show that trans people suffer from depression, self-harm and suicide at higher rates than the general population. If you feel depressed, try to find support to cope with the stress in your life. You might want to talk to family and friends or with a counsellor or others in a trans support group. Meditation, exercise and making time for things you enjoy may also be helpful.

SEXUAL HEALTH

Several recent studies show high rates of HIV infection in some groups of trans women in US cities, with estimates ranging from 22-47%. Trans women sex workers can be at particularly high risk of getting HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs) due to the demands of their work. Very little is known about the HIV risks for trans men, who are mostly invisible in sexual health research. There is some evidence that suggests that transgender and transsexual people have a high frequency of unprotected sex. This may be due to social isolation and low self-esteem caused by transphobia as well as the lack of relevant sexual health information. Other risk factors include sharing needles to inject hormones or silicone and using drugs or alcohol during sex. To reduce your risk and to protect your partners, get tested regularly for sexually transmitted infections, use condoms and lube and take care of your sex toys by using condoms and cleaning them before sharing with your partner(s).