



COMING OUT TO YOUR HEALTH CARE PROVIDER

One of the keys to good healthcare is being open with your healthcare provider. Doctors, nurses, physician assistants, psychotherapists and other professionals treating you need to know about your sexual orientation and gender identity to give the best care possible. Coming out to your doctor gives you an opportunity to be more open about your life as it relates to your health and better discuss a plan to stay healthy. Doctors have an obligation to maintain patient confidentiality, so arm them with the information they need to better manage your care. Coming out to your healthcare provider can make people nervous and uncomfortable. Fear of how a doctor will react may intimidate and prevent you from disclosing sexual orientation and impede access to quality health care.

Your doctor should not view being gay as a problem. Your care should be specifically tailored toward your lifestyle and should be taken just as seriously as the care of your doctor's straight patients. If you are not comfortable coming out to your doctor or their reception to your sexuality isn't positive, seek a medical professional in a more gay-affirmative environment.

Tips for Finding and Being Open with Healthcare Providers:

Ask for referrals. Ask friends or local LGBT centers for the names of LGBT-friendly healthcare providers. You can also check LGBT medical websites for referrals

Inquire by phone. When you call to make an appointment, ask if the practice has any LGBT patients. If you're nervous about asking, remember you don't have to give your name during that initial call.

Bring a friend. If you're uneasy about being open with your healthcare provider, consider asking a trusted friend to come with you.

Bring it up when you feel most comfortable. Ask your doctor for a few minutes to chat while you're still fully clothed – maybe even before you're in the exam room.

Know what to ask. Learn about the specific healthcare issues facing LGBT people.

Good provider checklist

- Is your health care provider receptive to questions?
- Does your provider take a complete medical history?
- Do you trust your provider?
- How does your provider handle issue of privacy and confidentiality?
- Will your provider respect your particular wishes for privacy?
- Does your provider explain their choices for treatment or non-treatment?
- Is your provider experienced working with gay, bisexual, lesbian, and/or transgendered patients?
- Do you feel your provider judges your sexual orientation or gender identity negatively?



IMPROVING YOUR HEALTHCARE

What can I do to improve my health if I'm Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual or Transgender (GLBT)?

Besides the things that everybody ought to do (eat well, exercise regularly, avoid cigarettes), GLBT individuals can do these things to improve our own health:

- ❖ In the absence of being allowed to marry or establish a civil union, it is especially critical to protect yourself and your partner in case of catastrophic illness:
 - *Designate a health-care power-of-attorney*, give a copy to your primary provider, to significant others, and carry one when you travel
 - *Purchase long-term care insurance* - Though less urgent for those in legal marriages or civil unions, these practices can still be helpful.
 - *If you are married or in a civil union*, make sure that is known to your health care providers
- ❖ Women and Trans Men (female-to-male transsexuals) with cervical tissue should have pelvic exams starting three years after your first sex that involved someone's penis, fingers, shared sex toy or tongue inside your vagina, or at age 21 at the latest, and then at least every three years.
- ❖ Women and Trans Men with breast tissue over age 40 should have annual mammograms.
- ❖ Those with depression, anxiety or substance abuse issues should talk with GLBT culturally-competent mental health or drug/alcohol treatment professionals.
- ❖ Those who have had unprotected sex, especially with more than one person or with someone who may have had multiple partners, should get tested for HIV, HPV and hepatitis.
- ❖ Those who might have sex in the future, especially if they aren't ready to settle down with one person "forever", should get hepatitis immunizations and learn how to make condoms and/or latex dams a comfortable, expected part of love-making.
- ❖ Work for equal health care benefits and financial safety for yourself and other GLBT people

TIPS FOR FAMILY MEMBERS OF GLBT INDIVIDUALS

- ❖ Support your loved ones' efforts to stop smoking, exercise, eat right and be sexually safe.
- ❖ If your loved one is your minor child, advocate for him or her and/or support teens in advocating for themselves. Insist that your lesbian teen be offered testing for sexually transmitted infections and not be assumed to be immune. Insist that your transgender child be referred to by his/her preferred name and pronouns. Insist that your gay nephew has a right not to be tested for HIV just because he happens to be gay, especially if he's never had sex, when what he really wanted was a sports physical. Insist that your bisexual grandchild has a right to be asked about his or her sexual behavior rather than having someone assume they know what a bisexual teen does.
- ❖ Make sure your loved one knows that you love and support them, value their health and their relationships and want them around for as long as possible.
- ❖ Examine your own prejudices and hold others accountable for theirs.
- ❖ Work for equal health care benefits and financial safety for your loved one and for other GLBT