



LGBT Wellness

Wellness is about being physically, mentally, and emotionally healthy. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people have unique wellness needs because of the health disparities they face.

10 things LGBT people can do to improve their wellness

1 Research Insurance Options

LGBT people, particularly those of color, are less likely to have health insurance than heterosexual people, hindering access to care.^(1,2) Visit <http://out2enroll.org> to learn how to get insured.

2 Use Preventive Care

LGBT people underuse preventive care like the HPV vaccine that can prevent cancer^(3,4) and screening services like mammography and Pap tests.^(5,6) Most preventive care is covered by many insurance plans.

3 Stay Smoke-free

Smoking kills 30,000+ LGBT people a year,⁽⁹⁾ and causes many respiratory and health problems throughout the lifespan.⁽¹⁰⁾ Three in ten LGBT people smoke,⁽¹¹⁾ but you can find a quitline and get help at <https://smokefree.gov/lgbt-and-smoking>.

4 Steer Clear of Substance Abuse

LGBT folks have higher levels of alcohol and drug use, which may be linked to experiencing discrimination.⁽¹⁴⁾ LGBT youth are 25% more likely to drink, 50% more likely to use marijuana, twice as likely to use ecstasy and cocaine, and four times as likely to use heroin and meth.⁽¹⁵⁾

5 Seek Mental Health Support

LGBT youth face elevated rates of suicide and frequently face bullying, sexual abuse, and other challenges that can carry through to adulthood.^(15,16) Learn more about mental health disparities and find resources at <https://www.nami.org/Find-Support/LGBTQ>.

6 Adopt a Healthier Lifestyle

Lesbian women are at twice the risk of being overweight as are heterosexual women^(17,18) and bisexual women might be at risk, too.⁽¹⁹⁾ A healthy weight and regular physical activity can prevent chronic health conditions, including some types of cancer.

7 Practice Safer Sex

Queer men and transgender women face very high HIV risk,^(20,21) and queer women and trans men have sexual health needs that often go ignored in the healthcare field.^(22,23) Learn safer sex practices at <http://tiny.cc/saferlgbt> and <http://tiny.cc/safertrans>.

8 Keep a Positive Body Image

Transgender youth are twice as likely to have attempted suicide if they had a desire to change their weight,⁽²⁴⁾ and queer youth can face eating disorders over unique body image issues they face.⁽²⁵⁾ Love your body and talk to a healthcare provider if you have concerns.

9 Limit Your UV Exposure

Sexual minority men have at least 56% higher odds of having skin cancer,⁽²⁶⁾ possibly as a result of tanning indoors and outside as a way to cope with negative body images.⁽²⁷⁾

10 Know Your Rights

You should feel safe talking to your providers about your health and wellness. If you're not comfortable with your current doctor, you should find a new one if possible. Learn about your rights, privacy, and options at <http://healthcarebillofrights.org>.

References for this document can be found at:
<http://hlthlnk.lgbt/fact-sheets>

LGBT HealthLink, a program of CenterLink, is a community-driven network of experts and professionals enhancing LGBT health by reducing tobacco-, cancer-, and other health-disparities within our communities. We are one of eight CDC-funded cancer & tobacco disparity networks. We link people & information to promote adoption of best practices in health departments & community organization to reduce LGBT cancer & tobacco disparities.

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