

## 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.

This can be a challenge for men who have sex with men given the stress of dealing with prejudice and discrimination. However, being gay is a wonderful, positive experience for many men and sexual orientation can be a source of pride and celebration.

Many men become healthier after coming out as they feel more in touch with who they really are and more in control of their lives.

Some things that can help you stay 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 gay and queer communities
- Figuring out what may be stressful for you and learning the best ways to deal with these stressors
- Learning about your body so that you know what to do to take care of yourself

## Good Health Care

Finding good healthcare can be difficult for gay men who have sex with men. Healthcare providers may be homophobic or they may not know much about your health concerns. This can make it difficult to come out to your healthcare provider, and some gay men may avoid seeking healthcare altogether. However, 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 healthcare:

- Ask GLBTQ friends about their healthcare providers, or check local queer newspapers and community directories for advice
- Visit potential providers and ask questions about their training and experience with GLBTQ health issues
- Check out the office space and look for gay-friendly posters, brochures, magazines or other signs of a GLBTQ-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
- Come out to your provider if you feel safe
- Shop around to find the best healthcare possible



## Ottawa Resources

### Canadian Cancer Society

Cancer Info Service 1-888-939-3333  
Smoker's Helpline 1-877-513-5333  
[www.cancer.ca](http://www.cancer.ca)

### The Sexual Health Centre

STI and Anonymous HIV Testing  
Sexual Health Info Line 613-563-2437

### Pink Triangle Services

Serving the gay, lesbian, bisexual, trans, two-spirit and queer communities in Ottawa  
613-563-4818  
[www.pinktriangle.org](http://www.pinktriangle.org)

### Carleton University GLBTQ Centre

613-520-3723  
[www.cusaonline.com/glbtc](http://www.cusaonline.com/glbtc)

## Internet Resources

### Gay Health

[www.gayhealth.com](http://www.gayhealth.com)

### Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Health Links

[www-hsl.mcmaster.ca/tomflem/gay.html](http://www-hsl.mcmaster.ca/tomflem/gay.html)

### Canadian Rainbow Health Coalition

[www.rainbowhealth.ca](http://www.rainbowhealth.ca)

### LGBT Health Channel

[www.gayhealthchannel.com](http://www.gayhealthchannel.com)

### GLBT Health

[www.metrokc.gov/health/glbtc/](http://www.metrokc.gov/health/glbtc/)

Adapted from the Sherbourne Health Centre  
with Support from The Rotary Club of Toronto.



Health information for gay men and men who have sex with men.



613-520-6674

[carleton.ca/health](http://carleton.ca/health)  
2600 CTTC Building

Men who have sex with men have many of the same health needs as other men, but cultural differences and homophobia mean that you may experience these needs differently. There are also some specific health issues that may be more likely to affect you. It is important that both you and your healthcare provider are aware of your healthcare needs. This brochure outlines some of the health issues that are of concern to gay men.

## Partner Abuse

Abuse can happen in any relationship, but abuse between men is often misunderstood and trivialized. Abuse is an attempt by one partner to gain power and control over the other. Sometimes it is difficult to recognize, but it might involve such behaviours as hitting, forced sexual acts, name-calling, threats and financial control. While limited services exist, abused gay men can seek help and support by talking with family, friends or a HCS or off-campus counsellor. Men who are abusive can seek professional help by talking with their healthcare provider or a counsellor.

## Sexual Health

The increased risk of HIV infection is well known in the gay community, and this has dominated discussions surrounding gay men's health for many years. Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) such as syphilis and gonorrhoea also occur in sexually active gay men at high rates. Men who have sex with men are at an increased risk for Hepatitis A and B infections, both of which may lead to liver and other problems. Safer sex practices have been successful in reducing the rates of HIV and other STIs over the past two decades, although there have been recent increases in the rates of several STIs. Get tested regularly, use condoms and lube and get vaccinated for Hepatitis A and B to reduce your risk and protect your partners.

## Alcohol and Drug Use

Despite controversy over the exact rate of substance use, evidence suggests that gay men are more likely than heterosexual men to use alcohol and other drugs. Gay men are more likely to report experiencing problems from alcohol use and continue to drink as they age. Gay men also use some recreational drugs at a higher rate than the general population. These "party" drugs are associated with dance clubs and circuit parties that are popular with many gay men, and their use is accepted by some men as part of the gay scene.

Alcohol or drugs may be used to cope with discrimination and internalized homophobia in queer communities and gay bars and dance parties often provide the only comfortable space to meet other men. Learning about the drugs you use can help make them safer. Ask yourself if your drug or alcohol use is affecting your health, relationships, job or finances. Also consider if it is leading you to take risks, sexual or otherwise, that you wouldn't take when you were sober. There are many types of drug and alcohol programs and your healthcare provider can help you choose one that is right for you. The HCS Health Educator can assess you for the Drink Wise program which assists you in cutting back on alcohol use. Call 613-520-6676 for more information.

## Cancer

Negative healthcare system experiences lead many gay men to avoid regular physical exams and routine screening. This puts gay men at a higher risk of late diagnosis and treatment of any type of cancer. Men who have anal sex are at a significantly higher risk for anal cancer than the general population. About 35 in every 100,000 HIV-negative gay men and about 70 in every 100,000 HIV-positive gay men develop anal cancer, compared to less than one in every 100,000 heterosexual men. These high rates are primarily due to an increased rate of human papillomavirus (HPV) infection. HPV is the virus that causes genital and anal warts and it has been shown to be a risk factor for the development of anal cancer. Researchers are currently developing a HPV vaccine specifically for men.

Higher rates of smoking tobacco also increase the risk of lung cancer and may add to the risk of other cancers. It is important for you to assess your personal risk factors and to have routine screenings for prostate, testicular and colon cancers. Some healthcare providers also recommend that men who have sex with men get regular anal pap smears which screen for HPV and abnormal tissue growth.

## Tobacco & Smoking

The minimal research that has been completed indicates that gay men smoke cigarettes at a much higher rate than straight men. In 2004, 20% of Canadian adults over 15 were current smokers while estimates for gay men range from 30-50%. Several factors contribute to these higher rates including high levels of social stress, frequent socializing in bars, higher rates of alcohol and drug use and targeted promotions by the tobacco industry. Smoking increases the risk of developing lung cancer, heart disease, and emphysema. There are programs and resources that can help you quit smoking. Check out [www.gosmokefree.ca](http://www.gosmokefree.ca).

## Emotional & Mental Health

There are many reasons why people may develop emotional or psychological problems during their lives, but gay men face particular challenges living in a homophobic and heterosexist world. Negative attitudes, discrimination and violence can contribute to mental and emotional distress for gay men. Coming out can be emotionally difficult with many men having to deal with rejection from family and friends. Staying in the closet can also be stressful, with the fear of discovery leading to isolation for some men. These stressors have a profound impact on self-esteem and self-identity, and studies show that gay men suffer from depression, anxiety and suicide at higher rates than heterosexual men. Try to find support to cope with stress if you feel depressed. You might want to speak to family and friends, a counsellor or others in a support group. The campus GLBTQ Centre is also a great resource. Meditation, exercise and making time for things you enjoy may also help.

## Nutrition, Fitness & Weight

Gay male culture has long valued physical beauty and youth. The desire to have a perfect body has resulted in compulsive exercising and steroid use for some men. This can lead to emotional distress and physical health problems. Gay men are more likely than straight men to have a poor body image and experience an eating disorder such as bulimia or anorexia nervosa. In contrast, some individuals in the gay community celebrate large bodies which may put them at higher risk for a number of health problems, including diabetes, high blood pressure and heart disease. Nutrition and weight concerns can become unhealthy if they make you feel depressed or cause physical harm. Educate yourself about good nutrition and develop a program of regular exercise that includes breaks and fun activities.