

Trans people often experience negative attitudes and discrimination when seeking healthcare. It can be very difficult to find knowledgeable and respectful healthcare services. While most of the healthcare needs of trans people are the same as everyone else, the impact of transphobia means that you may experience these health needs differently. You may face a specific set of health issues that need to be addressed if you take hormones or have had surgery. 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 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 completed, 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 a high risk for a number of health problems, including diabetes, high blood pressure and heart disease. Also, trans men who take testosterone may be at increased risk for heart disease due to a shift in their bodies' weight distribution. Wanting to look good and having a healthy body image is perfectly acceptable, however, 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.

Cancer

Transgender and transsexual people's risk 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 a higher risk for breast and ovarian cancer as extra testosterone in the body can be converted to estrogen which can cause health problems. Trans men are also at a 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 an increased 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 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 evidence suggests that substance abuse is a serious concern for some trans people. It is believed that many trans people may be more likely to use alcohol and other drugs compared to the general population. Alcohol and drugs are sometimes used to cope with transphobia, discrimination and depression in some transgender and transsexual communities. Learning about the drugs you use can help make them safer. Ask yourself if your drug use is affecting your health, relationships, job or finances. Also consider whether it 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 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

Tobacco & Smoking

While there is almost no research on tobacco use in transgender and transsexual communities, high smoking rates among lesbians and gay people suggest that trans people may also smoke more than the general population. 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 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. There are programs and resources to help you successfully quit smoking.

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 and world. Negative attitudes, discrimination and violence can contribute to mental and emotional distress for transgender and transsexual people. Coming out can be emotionally difficult with many trans people having to deal with rejection from family and friends. These stressors have a profound impact on self-esteem and self-identity, and studies show that trans people suffer from depression, self-harm and suicide at higher rates than the general population. Try to find support to cope with the stress in your life if you feel depressed. You might want to speak to family and friends or with 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.

Sexual Health

Several recent studies show high rates of HIV infection on some groups of trans women in US cities, with estimates ranging from 22-47%. Trans women sex workers can be at a particularly higher 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. Get regular STI testing, use condoms and lube and take care of sex toys by using condoms and cleaning them before and after sharing with your partners.

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 transsexual and transgender people given the stress of dealing with prejudice and discrimination. However, being trans is a wonderful, positive experience for many people and sexual orientation can be a source of pride and celebration.

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

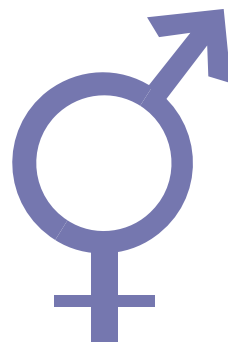
Some things that can help you stay healthy include:

- 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 trans 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 transsexual and transgender people. Healthcare providers may be transphobic or they may not know much about your health concerns. This can make it difficult to reveal your gender identity to your healthcare provider, and some trans people 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 other trans people 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

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

Carleton University GLBTQ Centre

613-520-3723
www.cusaonline.com/glbtc

Internet Resources

Trans-Health.com

www.trans-health.com

Transgender Care

www.transgendercare.com/default.asp

International Journal of Transgenderism

www.symposion.com/ijt

Canadian Rainbow Health Coalition

www.rainbowhealth.ca

LGBT Health Channel

www.gayhealthchannel.com

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



Health information for transsexual and transgender people.



613-520-6674
carleton.ca/health
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