



10 Health Issues Lesbians Should Discuss with their Healthcare Provider

These are the most important topics that [Gay and Lesbian Medical Association](#) healthcare providers have identified for patients who identify as a lesbian, as adapted by One Colorado. These items may not apply to everyone and are not listed in rank order.

1. **Sexual Health:** It's important that your provider knows your identity so they can provide you the best care. Lesbians can get all of the same sexually transmitted infections (STIs) as heterosexual women. This may be from skin-to-skin contact, vaginal fluids, menstrual blood, or mucous membrane contact. If you're sexually active, talk to your provider about what screening tests are available.
2. **Fitness:** [Research shows](#) that lesbians, on average, tend to be more overweight than heterosexual women. Talk to your provider about healthier eating and exercise if this is a problem for you. Obesity is associated with higher rates of heart disease, cancers, and premature death.
3. **Tobacco Use:** [Lesbians, on average, tend to use tobacco at higher rates than heterosexual women.](#) This may be due to minority stress, discrimination, and/or sexism. Tobacco use is associated with higher rates of cancers, heart disease, and emphysema. Talk to your provider about cessation or healthier ways of using.
4. **Alcohol Use:** [Heavy drinking and binge drinking is more common among lesbians than heterosexual women.](#) This may also be due to similar reasons as stated above. Excessive drinking is associated with higher rates of cancers, liver disease, and other health problems. Talk to your provider about what healthy use might look like for you.
5. **Substance Use:** [Lesbians tend to use more illicit substances than heterosexual women.](#) This may be due to a variety of reasons. Talk to your provider about safer ways of using or other healthier ways to cope with stress.
6. **Mental Health:** [Chronic minority stress, along with potential loss of social supports after coming out or concealing your identity, leads to higher rates of anxiety and depression among lesbians.](#) Be open with your provider about your mental health goals and how to achieve them together.
7. **Heart Health:** [Heart disease is the leading cause of death for all women, regardless of sexual orientation.](#) Higher rates of obesity, tobacco use, and substance use among lesbians increase this risk. Ask your provider for yearly blood pressure, cholesterol, and diabetes testing to monitor your health.
8. **Intimate Partner Violence:** It is a myth that lesbians do not experience intimate partner violence, and many providers fail to ask their patients about how safe they feel in their relationship. [Some research](#) indicates that rates of violence may even be higher in lesbian relationships. If you're experiencing intimate partner violence, your provider can connect you to resources to ensure your safety.
9. **Breast Cancer:** [Lesbians are less likely to undergo breast cancer screening than heterosexual women,](#) though they may be at increased risk due to factors discussed



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above. Early diagnosis is the key to successful treatment. Your provider can keep you up-to-date on your mammograms.

- 10. Gynecologic Cancer:** Having regular pap tests and pelvic exams can find cancers earlier and guide treatment. [Some lesbians may be at increased risk of certain gynecologic cancers.](#) Talk to your provider about ways to reduce your risk and stay up to date on your screening exams.