


10 THINGS for LESBIAN/BISEXUAL WOMEN to DISCUSS WITH THEIR HEALTHCARE PROVIDERS



Following are health issues that healthcare providers have identified as most commonly of concern for lesbians and bisexual women. **While not all of these items apply to everyone, it's wise to be aware of these issues.**

1. **Breast Cancer** - Lesbian/bisexual women are more likely to have risk factors for breast cancer yet less likely to get screening exams. This combination means that lesbian/bisexual women may not be diagnosed early when the disease is most curable.

2. **Depression/Anxiety** - Lesbian/bisexual women may experience chronic stress from discrimination. This stress is worse for women who need to hide their orientation as well as for lesbian/bisexual women who have lost important emotional support because of their orientation.

3. **Heart Health** - Heart disease is the leading cause of death for women. Smoking and obesity are the biggest risk factors for heart disease among lesbians. All lesbian/bisexual women need yearly medical exams for high blood pressure, cholesterol problems, and diabetes. Health care providers can also offer tips on quitting smoking, increasing physical activity, and controlling weight.

4. **Gynecological Cancer** - Lesbian/bisexual women have higher risks for certain types of gynecological (GYN) cancers compared to straight women. Having regular pelvic exams and pap tests can find cancers early and offer the best chance of cure.

5. **Fitness** - Research shows that lesbian/bisexual women are more likely to be overweight or obese compared to heterosexual women. Obesity is associated with higher rates of heart disease, cancers, and premature death. Lesbian/bisexual women need competent and supportive advice about healthy living and healthy eating, as well as healthy exercise.

6. **Tobacco** - Research also shows that lesbian/bisexual women use tobacco more often than heterosexual women do. It is easy to get addicted to smoking, even if smoking if it's only done socially. Smoking has been associated with higher rates of cancers, heart disease, and emphysema — three major causes of death among women.

7. **Alcohol** - Heavy drinking and binge drinking are more common among lesbian/bisexual women compared to other women. While one drink a day may be good for the heart, more than that can be raise your risk of cancer, liver disease and other health problems.

8. **Substance Use** - Lesbian/bisexual women may use drugs more often than heterosexual women. This can be due to stress from homophobia, sexism, and/or discrimination. Lesbian/bisexual women need support to find healthy ways to cope and reduce stress.

9. **Intimate Partner Violence** - Contrary to stereotypes, some lesbian/bisexual women experience violence in their intimate relationships. However, health care providers do not ask lesbian/bisexual women about intimate partner violence as often as they ask heterosexual women. Lesbian/bisexual women need to be asked about violence and have access to welcoming counseling and shelters when needed.

10. **Sexual Health** - Lesbian/bisexual women can get the same sexually transmitted infections (STDs) as heterosexual women. Lesbian/bisexual women can give each other STDs by skin-to-skin contact, mucus membrane contact, vaginal fluids, and menstrual blood. It is important for sexually active lesbian/bisexual women to be screened for STDs by a health care provider.

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