

# Ten Things Transgender Persons Should Discuss with their Health Care Providers



Following are the health issues GLMA's healthcare providers have identified as most commonly of concern for Transgender People. While not all of these items apply to everyone, it's wise to be aware of these issues.

## 1 Access to Healthcare

It is not easy to find a healthcare provider who knows how to treat transgender people. Sometimes it is difficult to find someone who will agree to treat you. Some providers may feel that there is something wrong with you because you are a transgender person. They are not correct, of course. They may not understand that you have always been this way. Even if you do find someone who will treat you, your insurance may not pay for the treatment. Ask your provider if your costs will be covered by your insurance. If they will not, ask if they will reduce your bill so you can pay.

## 2 Health History

It's important for you to be able to trust your healthcare provider. Tell them about the medicines you have taken and the surgeries you may have had. If your provider knows what has happened with you in the past, he or she will be better able to give you the best treatment today.

## 3 Hormones

Talk with your provider about hormone treatment. If you are starting hormones for the first time, ask about the things you need to watch out for while taking these medicines. If you are a transgender woman, ask about estrogen and blood clots, swelling, high or low blood pressure and high blood sugar. If you are a transgender man, ask about the blood tests you will need to be sure your testosterone dose is safe. Be sure and take only the hormones prescribed by your provider.

## 4 Cardiovascular Health

Transgender persons may be at increased risk for heart attack or stroke, not only from hormone use but from cigarette smoking, overweight, high blood pressure and diabetes. Transgender women may fear that their provider may make them stop estrogen if they develop heart trouble, and so they may not report feelings such as chest pain or trouble breathing. Be sure to tell your provider if you do have these feelings.

## 5 Cancer

It is very rare to develop cancer due to hormone treatment, but your provider will evaluate you for this possibility when he or she sees you for check-ups. Your provider will also check for possible cancer of your sex organs, if they have not been removed. Again this is very rare but it should be checked along with the rest of your physical examination.

## 6 Sexually Transmitted Diseases and Safe Sex

Transgender people, particularly young transgender people, may be engaging in sexual activity. Just like anyone else, transgender people may get a sexually transmitted disease. It is very important to practice safe sex, so you will not become infected with HIV or other sexually transmitted diseases. Ask your provider about safe sex practices.

## 7 Alcohol and Tobacco

Transgender persons who drink alcohol may drink too much and risk damage to the liver or other organs. Too much alcohol may also cause a person to treat themselves or other people badly, or to drive unsafely. Alcohol and hormones may be more dangerous when taken together. Many transgender people smoke cigarettes. This increases their risk of heart and lung disease, especially in persons taking hormones. Transgender persons who care about their health should not smoke, and they should drink only small amounts, if at all.

## 8 Depression

It is very easy for transgender persons to become sad and depressed. If our families or friends don't want to see us anymore, it is a very depressing time. Even after transition, depression can still be a problem. When someone is depressed, they cannot be happy no matter what they are doing. Depressed persons may make bad choices and may harm themselves. Please talk with your provider or your therapist about your feelings and tell him or her if you feel sad or depressed. Many good treatments are available for depression.

## 9 Injectable Silicone

Some transgender women want to look feminine and beautiful without having to wait for the effects of estrogen. They expect injections of silicone to give them "instant curves." The silicone, sold at "pumping parties" by non-medical persons, may move around in the tissues and cause ugly scars years later. It is usually not medical grade, may be contaminated and is often injected using a shared needle. You can get hepatitis or HIV through shared needles. Silicone is dangerous and should not be used.

## 10 Fitness (Diet & Exercise)

Many transgender people are overweight and do not exercise. It is hard to make time for exercise if you have to work long hours. A healthy diet and a frequent exercise routine are just as important for transgender persons as for anyone else. If you are planning to have surgery, your surgeon will want to be sure you are in good physical condition to do well during and after surgery. Try to eat a healthy diet and try to exercise for at least 20 minutes three times a week.

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