

# Top 10 Things Lesbians Should Discuss with their Healthcare Provider



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

## 1 Breast Cancer

Lesbians are more likely to have risk factors for breast cancer yet less likely to get screening exams. This combination means that lesbians may not be diagnosed early when the disease is most curable.

## 2 Depression/Anxiety

Lesbians may experience chronic stress from discrimination. This stress is worse for women who need to hide their orientation as well as for lesbians who have lost important emotional support because of their orientation. Living with this stress can cause depression and anxiety.

## 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 lesbians 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

Lesbians 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 lesbians 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. Lesbians need competent and supportive advice about healthy living and healthy eating, as well as healthy exercise.

## 6 Tobacco

Research also shows that lesbians 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 lesbians compared to other women. While one drink a day may be good for the heart, more than that can raise your risk of cancer, liver disease and other health problems.

## 8 Substance Use

Lesbians may use drugs more often than heterosexual women. This can be due to stress from homophobia, sexism, and/or discrimination. Lesbians need support to find healthy ways to cope and reduce stress.

## 9 Intimate Partner Violence

Contrary to stereotypes, some lesbians experience violence in their intimate relationships. However, health care providers do not ask lesbians about intimate partner violence as often as they ask heterosexual women. Lesbians need to be asked about violence and have access to welcoming counseling and shelters when needed.

## 10 Sexual Health

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

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