



You'll find lots of resources online to keep your heart healthy. Visit gaycenter.org for information about the LGBT SmokeFree project to help you quit smoking, and heart.org for delicious heart healthy recipes from the American Heart Association.

Six Things Every LGBT Older Adult Should Know About Cardiovascular Disease and Hypertension

Cardiovascular conditions can have serious consequences, but the good news is that there are many ways to diminish the risks associated with these diseases. Read these six important points, and see the reverse for some simple tips to reduce your risk and keep your heart healthy.

1. One Name for Many Diseases

The term cardiovascular disease actually refers to any of the diseases that affect the cardiovascular system. The most common of these is hypertension, a chronic condition in which blood pressure within the arteries is elevated. However, this term also encompasses: heart failure, which means the heart isn't pumping blood as well as it should, arrhythmia, or an abnormal rhythm of the heart, and heart valve problems that prevent valves from opening or closing properly.

2. Take it Seriously

Cardiovascular disease is the leading cause of death in the U.S., and according to the World Health Organization, more people die annually from this disease than from any other cause. And while it was once thought of as a "man's disease," it can impact anyone.

3. These Diseases are Easily Overlooked

Hypertension, or high blood pressure, can take years to develop. You may go for years without any symptoms, though damage to blood vessels and your heart continues and can be detected. Uncontrolled high blood pressure increases your risk of serious health problems, including heart attack and stroke.

4. A Common Root Cause

The root cause of many cardiovascular diseases is atherosclerosis, or a buildup of plaque which narrows the arteries. If a blood clot forms, it can even stop the blood flow, causing a heart attack or stroke. Luckily, there are several simple ways to prevent this condition: quitting smoking, eating healthy foods, exercising regularly and maintaining a healthy weight.

(see the reverse of this sheet to learn more!)

DID YOU KNOW?

Because of a lifetime of discrimination and barriers to LGBT-friendly healthcare (among other reasons), LGBT older people deal with significant health disparities across areas related to physical and mental health, including high blood pressure, cholesterol, diabetes, heart disease, HIV/AIDS and more. Read more at sageusa.org/issues/health



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5. Avoid the Risk Factors

Certain factors put some people at a greater risk for cardiovascular disease and hypertension. Having high levels of stress, elevated blood pressure and a family history of heart disease greatly increases your chances of developing heart disease. Additionally, lifestyle factors such as a lack of physical activity, smoking, alcohol consumption and being overweight can also contribute to the onset of heart disease.

6. Some are More Vulnerable

According to research, LGBT older adults and people of color are especially vulnerable to cardiovascular disease and hypertension, due to poorer health outcomes.

Reduce Your Risk and Stay Heart Healthy With These Tips

- **Commit to Quit.** If you use tobacco, quitting is the most powerful thing you can do to reduce your risk of cardiovascular disease and improve your overall health. No amount of smoking is safe—but there's good news, too—after you quit, your risk of heart disease drops almost to that of a nonsmoker in about five years! The LGBT SmokeFree project at the Center can help you to quit. Visit gaycenter.org for more information.
- **Get Moving.** Our bodies were meant to be active. To keep your heart healthy, try to get 30 minutes of exercise most days—but even shorter amounts of exercise offer heart benefits, too, and you'll get the same benefits by working out for three 10-minute sessions most days of the week. Many everyday activities like housekeeping, taking the stairs, and walking when you run errands also count as exercise!
- **Use DASH When you Dine.** The DASH plan (Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension) simplifies the best dietary tips to keep your heart healthy. The plan emphasizes vegetables, fruits, and fat-free or low-fat dairy products, and limits sodium, sweets, sugary beverages, and red meats. But DASH dining doesn't have to be bland!
- **Soothe the Stress.** Everyone experiences stress, but LGBT older adults may face particular challenges due to lifelong discrimination. Unfortunately, stress takes a toll on the body and can be a risk factor for heart problems. Remember to take time for daily relaxation, hobbies you enjoy, and laughter with friends.

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