

Cancer Risks for Gay and Bisexual Men



Gay and bisexual men are at higher risk for certain kinds of cancer. The cancers you should know about are covered here. There are things you can do to help lower your risk for many of these cancers. You may even be able to keep them from ever starting.

Gender words are used here to talk about anatomy and health risk. Please use this information in a way that works best for you and your provider as you talk about your care.



Lung cancer

Gay and bisexual men are more likely to smoke than heterosexual men. Smoking is the main cause of lung cancer. It's also linked to many other kinds of cancer. Smoking causes serious health problems other than cancer, too, like stroke, lung disease, and heart disease.

If you have HIV, smoking weakens your immune system and reduces your life expectancy a lot. That's even if you have the HIV under control.

Anal cancer

Anal cancer is much more likely in gay and bisexual men. The main risk factor for it is having anal sex with men. The risk of anal cancer is even greater if you've been infected with high-risk types of HPV (human papillomavirus). The risk is also higher if you:

- Have had many sex partners or unprotected sex (this increases your chance of HPV infection)
- Smoke
- Have a weakened immune system because of HIV

Skin cancer

Anyone can get skin cancer. You are at a higher risk, though, if you have:

- Fair skin. If you also have blond or red hair, your risk is even higher.
- A history of bad sunburns at a young age
- Current or past use of tanning beds
- Frequent and prolonged sun exposure

- A weakened immune system
- Close family members with skin cancer

Prostate cancer

All men are at risk for prostate cancer. In fact, prostate cancer is the most common cancer in men, except for skin cancer. But it's more likely to occur in:

- Men of African ancestry
- Those with a family history of prostate cancer
- Men older than age 50

Testicular cancer

Some studies have found that men living with HIV or AIDS may be at a higher risk for this type of cancer. Testicular cancer tends to happen in younger men between ages 20 and 34, but it can happen at any age. Men also have a higher risk for it if they:

- Are white
- Have undescended testicles
- Have a family history of testicular cancer

Colon cancer

This cancer happens most often in men who are age 50 and older. It's also more likely in men with:

- Inflammatory bowel disease
- Colon or rectal polyps
- Personal or family history of colon cancer
- Type 2 diabetes

These lifestyle factors also play a role in the risk for colon cancer:

- Smoking
- Drinking a lot of alcohol
- Being overweight
- Not being active
- Eating a diet with a lot of red and processed meat

What can be done?

If you have risk factors for any of these cancers, you can help lower your risk by:

- Eating a healthy diet
- Exercising and being active

- Getting to and staying at a healthy weight. Ask your healthcare provider for help if needed.
- Staying away from alcohol. If you choose to drink, don't have more than 2 drinks per day.
- Not smoking. Don't start and stay away from other people's smoke, too. If you do smoke, get help to quit.
- Getting the HPV vaccine. Talk with your healthcare provider to find out if the vaccine could benefit you.
- Limiting your time in the sun and protecting your skin when you're outside

It's also important to get regular checkups and cancer screenings. Talk with a healthcare provider about the schedule that's best for you.

Routine checkups play a role in your overall health. They can help find health changes like heart disease, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and diabetes. Many of these can be treated to keep them from getting worse. Checkups might also include skin and testicular exams.

Cancer screening tests help find cell changes (precancers), before they become cancer. Screening can also find cancer early, when it's small and before it causes symptoms. Finding cancer when it's small and hasn't spread often makes it easier to treat. Screenings are available for lung, prostate, and colon cancer. You should also be aware of how your skin and testicles normally look and feel. Report any changes to your healthcare provider. A healthcare provider can talk with you about cancer screening: what your choices are and when you should start.

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