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Cancer Facts for Gay and Bisexual Men

Recognizing barriers, saving lives

- **Low rates of health insurance:** Many health insurance policies do not cover unmarried partners. This makes it harder for many gay and bisexual men to get quality health care. Many states now offer family health insurance plans that may help you get coverage in other ways.
- **Fear of discrimination:** Many men do not tell their doctors about their sexual orientation, because they don't want discrimination to affect the quality of health care they receive. This can make it harder to establish a strong connection with a provider. A lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender/transsexual (LGBT) community center or group may be able to refer you to LGBT-friendly health care providers.
- **Negative experiences with health care professionals:** Fear of another negative experience with a health care professional can lead some men to delay or avoid medical care, especially routine care such as early detection tests. Missing routine cancer screenings can lead to cancer being diagnosed at a later stage, when it's harder to treat. Today, there are many LGBT-friendly professionals. Don't give up – find the respectful care you deserve!

Lung cancer

Who is at risk?

People who smoke are at greatest risk for lung cancer, and current evidence suggests that gay and bisexual men are more likely to smoke (33.2%) than men in the general population (21.3%). Smoking is responsible for 87% of all lung cancers, as well as a host of other tobacco-related diseases such as heart disease, stroke, and emphysema. Research further suggests that HIV makes the lungs less able to recover from the damage caused by smoking. Smoking is common in bars and clubs where gay and bisexual men may socialize. This exposure increases the risk of lung cancer and other diseases caused by secondhand smoke.

The best defense: Prevention

Lung cancer is one of the few cancers that can often be prevented simply by not smoking. If you don't smoke, don't start, and reduce your exposure to secondhand smoke by seeking smoke-free places. If you or a loved one smokes, talk to a health care professional about quitting, or call 1-800-227-2345 to find out how we can help double your chances of quitting for good.

Skin cancer

Who is at risk?

People with fair skin, especially those with blond or red hair, are at greater risk for skin cancer than people with darker coloring. But anyone who spends a lot of time in the sun is at risk. People who have had close family members with melanoma or who had severe sunburns before the age of 18 are at higher risk.

The best defense: Prevention and early detection

Most skin cancers can be prevented by staying out of the midday sun for long periods of time. Here are some other things you can do to prevent skin cancer:

- Protect your skin by wearing hats with wide brims, long-sleeved shirts, and sunglasses when you are outside.
- Use sunscreen with an SPF of 15 or higher on all exposed skin, even on cloudy or overcast days because UV rays travel through clouds.

- Avoid other sources of UV light, like tanning beds and sunlamps.
- Know your skin and report any skin changes to your doctor or nurse. Have a skin exam during your regular health check-ups.

Prostate cancer

Who is at risk?

Most prostate cancer occurs in men older than 50. African American men are more likely than white men to develop prostate cancer. Having one or more close relatives with prostate cancer also increases a man's risk, as does eating a lot of red meat or high-fat dairy products.

The best defense: Early detection

Prostate cancer can usually be found in its early stages by having a prostate-specific antigen (PSA) blood test and a rectal exam. Your doctor should talk to you about these tests every year starting when you are 50. Talk about the benefits and limitations of testing so that you can make an informed decision. If you are African American or have close relatives who have had prostate cancer, you should begin having these discussions at age 45.

Colon cancer

Who is at risk?

Most colorectal cancers (commonly known as colon cancer) are found in people 50 and older. People with a personal or family history of the disease, or people who have polyps in the colon or rectum, or inflammatory bowel disease are at greater risk. Eating a diet high in red and processed meat, being overweight, smoking, and being inactive also increase risk.

The best defense: Prevention and early detection

Colon cancer almost always starts with a polyp – a small growth on the lining of the colon or rectum. Testing can save lives by finding polyps before they become cancer. If pre-cancerous polyps are removed, colon cancer can be prevented. A diet that includes plenty of fruits and vegetables, whole grains, and limits red or processed meat may also lower risk.

The American Cancer Society recommends all people at average risk for colorectal cancer have 1 of the following testing options beginning at age 50:

Tests that find polyps and cancer:

- Flexible sigmoidoscopy every 5 years
- Double-contrast barium enema every 5 years
- Colonoscopy every 10 years
- A CT colonography every 5 years

OR

Tests that find mainly cancer:

- Fecal occult blood test (FOBT) or fecal immunochemical test (FIT), also known as a stool blood test, every year
- Stool DNA test (sDNA), interval uncertain

Tests that have the best chance of finding both polyps and cancer should be your first choice when possible. Talk with your doctor or nurse to find out which tests are right for you.

Anal cancer

Who is at risk?

Exposure to the human papilloma virus (HPV) increases the risk of anal cancer. HPV risk is increased by having anal intercourse and many sex partners. Smoking is also a risk factor. Other risk factors include reduced immunity due to HIV infection or other factors, and long-term problems in the anal area, such as fistulas (abnormal openings).

The best defense: Prevention and early detection

You can reduce your risk of anal cancer by not having many sex partners and using condoms. (Condoms will not always protect against HPV, because HPV can pass by skin-to-skin contact with any area of the body, such as skin of the genital or anal area not covered by the condom. Still, it is very important to use condoms to protect against HIV and other diseases that are passed on through body fluids.) Quitting smoking will also lower your risk of anal cancer and many other cancers.

Be aware of any rectal symptoms and report them to a health care professional right away. A rectal exam will find some cases of anal cancer early. Some experts recommend screening with an anal pap test for those who might be at high risk for anal cancer. This test has not been studied enough to know how often it should be done, or if it actually reduces the risk of anal cancer.

Testicular cancer

Who is at risk?

Most testicular cancers occur in men between the ages of 20 and 54. White men have a higher risk than men of other races. The main risk factor for testicular cancer is a condition called cryptorchidism, or undescended testicle(s). A family history of testicular cancer also increases a man's risk. Some evidence suggests that men with HIV, especially those with AIDS, are at greater risk.

The best defense: Early detection

About 90% of testicular cancers start with a lump on a testicle that is often painless. Men may also notice swelling, or have a heaviness or aching in the lower abdomen or scrotum. Any of these signs or symptoms should be brought to a health care professional's attention right away.

The best defense against cancer is finding it early

Early detection – finding cancer early before you have symptoms and before it has spread – gives you the best chance for treatment. All men should see a doctor or nurse on a regular basis and get the cancer screenings that are appropriate for them, as well as make healthy lifestyle choices that reduce cancer risk. Knowing about these cancers and how they can be prevented or found early may save your life or the life of someone you love.

To learn more about how the American Cancer Society is saving lives by helping people stay well through prevention and early detection, call us at 1-800-227-2345.

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