



Lesbian and Bisexual Women's Health



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Introduction

Greenbow is aware that there is not enough accessible information about health issues for lesbians and bisexual women. This information is extremely important for a person's safety and well-being.

Many lesbians and bisexual women are embarrassed to ask for advice or look for support and as a result of this may ignore health problems they are experiencing. For this reason, Greenbow wants to provide some basic facts about health issues, such as sexual health, breast cancer and menopause, among others.

The information provided is sourced from various reliable websites. We have referenced the websites so you can find more in-depth knowledge on any of the topics if you wish. We also have included the contact details for health organisations that lesbians and bisexual women can visit or get in touch with directly.

Our aim is that each woman who reads this material will become more aware of their body and will know who to contact if they are worried about their health. Greenbow is willing to meet members or provide extra support. Please contact us if you have any concerns.

We hope you find this information useful.

Greenbow Board

Rights / Responsibilities

It's important as a lesbian to know what your rights and responsibilities are.

Rights:-

- Right to a full and satisfying sexual life
- Right to life and freedom
- Right to have relationships with other women
- Right to be treated with kindness and respect
- Right to live without violence
- Right to privacy and to have some space to yourself
- Right to feel safe wherever you are
- Right to have support and services without discrimination
- Right to access sexual health information in the format you understand

Responsibilities:-

- To look after your own sexual health
- To treat other people with kindness and respect
- To practice safer sex
- To allow other people privacy and space to themselves
- To ask for help if you have problems
- To ask questions if you do not understand

Who are Lesbian and Bisexual?

A lesbian is a woman who is sexually and/or emotionally attracted to women rather than men.

A bisexual woman may be sexually and/or emotionally attracted to either men or women.

Women's Fitness and Exercise

A lot of lesbians and bi women like to keep active and enjoy sport. It is important to exercise regularly to stay healthy and not become overweight.

Recommendations for a healthy lifestyle:

- Eat healthy food
- Exercise for a minimum of 30 minutes, 5 times a week
- Don't smoke
- Don't drink too much alcohol, too often.
- Look after yourself
- Dancing can be fun and is also a good way to lose weight



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Being overweight can cause health problems, for example, diabetes, heart disease and high blood pressure. For more information on different illnesses/diseases, checkout www.irishhealth.com

There are many sport clubs and social groups for lesbians, some of these are:

Cork Gay Hill Walkers: <http://www.corkgayhillwalkers.com>

Dublin Front Runners (Gay and Lesbian running club in the Phoenix Park):
<http://www.frontrunners.org/clubs/dublin/index.html>

Out and About Hiking - Gay and Lesbian Group meets every Sunday morning at 10am in Dublin: <http://www.gay-hiking.org/>

Out in Ireland - Irelands Gay and Lesbian Sports Network (Tennis, Rowing, Badminton, Squash) <http://www.outinireland.net>

Phoenix Tigers (lesbian soccer team in Dublin): <http://www.phoenixtigers.com/>

Table-Tennis at Linc, Cork - Every Thursday from 9-10pm. Tel No: (021) 4808600

Email: info@linc.ie

Information sourced from LASI Online Belfast <http://www.lasionline.org/the-issues/health/10-things-to-discuss.html>

Lesbian Parents

There are hundreds of lesbian mothers in Ireland. Many of them have children from previous relationships with men, and many of them have decided to get pregnant as lesbians. When a lesbian decides she wants to get pregnant, she has a number of choices as to how to go about it. Below are two popular choices for lesbians in Ireland.

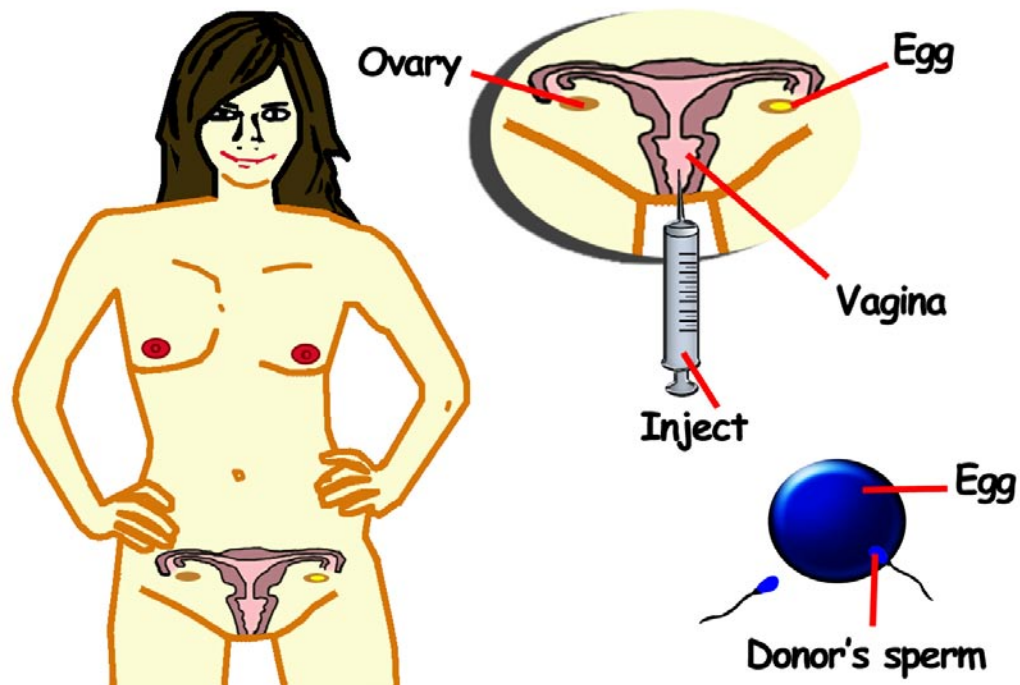
AI (Artificial Insemination) which is often done **at home** with a sperm donor. This is often arranged between friends, and sometimes a lesbian looks for a sperm donor by advertising. The sperm donor is a man who gives sperm to a woman, to make a baby. He ejaculates into a container, which is brought to the woman (usually in another room) and she injects (inseminates) the semen into her vagina.

This is often a very successful method of getting pregnant, and has the advantage of being **free**. However there are some important things to consider. The sperm donor should be checked for HIV and STIs beforehand and abstain from unprotected sex with anyone else in the meantime.

Something else you might like to think about is how much involvement the man has. People arrange this in many different ways, from no involvement at all, to a very actively involved father. Often the man is a bit like a friendly uncle figure. But something to bear in mind is that once the baby is born, feelings can change and the man might want more involvement. If the sperm donor's name is put on the birth certificate as father, he will remain the legal father of the child (by law), and therefore must be consulted about many future decisions, as there may be legal complications.

IVF (In Vitro Fertilisation), this is done **in a clinic** and can be expensive. The woman's eggs are taken out of her ovaries and fertilized by sperm under a microscope. The sperm donor (the man) is usually anonymous. Once the

fertilization is confirmed, 2 or 3 embryos are put into the woman's uterus (womb). Hopefully then, at least one will develop and become a normal pregnancy. For more information contact SIMS IVF unit, see: – www.sims.ie or Clane General Hospital, Prosperous Road, Clane, Co. Kildare – see: www.clanehospital.ie



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Children from LGBT families

There is wide-spread research from around Europe and the USA showing overwhelmingly that children raised by lesbian parents are just as happy, and well adjusted as children raised by heterosexual parents.

- There is anecdotal evidence that suggests children of lesbian parents are more open-minded as adults.
- There is no evidence to suggest that the children of lesbian and gay parents are less intelligent, suffer from more problems, are less popular, or have lower self-esteem than children of heterosexual parents.
- Good parenting is not influenced by sexual orientation. Rather, it is influenced most profoundly by a parent's ability to create a loving and nurturing home -- an ability that does not depend on whether a parent is gay or straight.
- The children of lesbian and gay parents grow up as happy, healthy and well-adjusted as the children of heterosexual parents.

Some of these points are taken from the website listed below:

http://www.aclu.org/lgbt-rights_hiv-aids/overview-lesbian-and-gay-parenting-adoption-and-foster-care

Some lesbian/bisexual mothers are worried that their child may be more likely to be bullied at school because of their family background. There is no evidence to suggest this is the case. There are many reasons bullying happens, and LGBT people might have been bullied themselves, leading them to be overly concerned about this. However research suggests that children of lesbian parents are not more likely to be bullied than other children.

In a way children of lesbian/bisexual parents have their own coming out issues to deal with. They decide at their own pace when and how to tell their friends about their parents. This may be ongoing, becoming a regular part of life. It is felt that

children should be supported in making their own decisions around what feels safe, while being careful not to pass on your own fears. It is important they are able to discuss their feelings without feeling judged.

The recent Civil Partnership Bill/Act does not offer any legal protection to children who are being raised by lesbian parents. The non-biological parent (often the partner of the natural mother) is still not allowed by law to adopt the child and become a legal parent. This has been deeply criticized by the LGBT community and it is hoped that these protections will be added in due course. The inadequate provision of the Bill/Act leaves the non-biological parent and the child vulnerable to these situations:

- If there is an emergency and the child of a lesbian parent needs to attend the local GP or hospital, permission for treatment by the non-biological parent might not be accepted, since they are not a legal parent.
- Lesbian couples may be living together for years. However, if the biological mother dies the partner has no right by law to have guardianship/ custody of their child. Other family members, such as aunts, uncles and grandparents would have more legal rights to the child.

Biological parent means the woman who gave birth to the child

Non-biological parent means the parent who did **not** give birth to the child e.g. partner of the mother.

For more information about the civil partnership legislation, see www.glen.ie.

For more information/support, contact:

-Gay Switchboard Dublin at 01 - 872 1055 (Monday to Friday 7.30pm to 9pm) or email info@gayswitchboard.ie

-Lesbian Line Dublin at 01 - 872 9911 (Thursday 7pm to 9pm).

-Linc at 021 480 8600 or email info@linc.ie

A few more helpful websites:

<http://www.growingkids.co.uk/GayLesbianParents.html>

http://www.rightsofwomen.org.uk/pdfs/lesbian_parenting.pdf

<http://www.lgbtqparentingconnection.ca/home.cfm>

<http://www.uwo.ca/pridelib/family/index.html>

<http://www.gayparentmag.com/index.html>

Fostering and Adoption

Fostering means looking after another person's child in your own home. Children of all ages may need foster care and it can be short-term or long term. The aim is that the child will return to their family home as soon as it is possible. There are lots of reasons why children cannot stay at home and are taken into foster care. Their family may not be able to cope due to illness, addiction, (like drugs or alcohol), learning disabilities, financial problems. The child may come into the care of the HSE after agreement with the parents or as a result of a court case. Sometimes the child may need to stay with a brother or sister and therefore the HSE tries to make this happen.

Adoption is permanent. The adoptive parents have gone through the legal process of having the child become a member of the family. Adoption can happen in Ireland or through another country (inter-country adoption).

Interestingly, the HSE mentions on their website that; "couples - married, cohabitating, same gender" can apply to foster a child. However, to adopt the only couples who qualify to apply are "a married couple living together; this is the only circumstance where the law permits the adoption of a child by more than one person". Under the present system same-sex couples cannot marry, therefore they cannot adopt. However, "a sole applicant" (single person) may qualify to apply for adoption.

(Information sourced from HSE website - www.fostering.ie)

Greenbow is not aware of any openly gay/lesbian people who have successfully fostered/ adopted a child. However, we would be very interested to find out if any Deaf LGBT people have fostered or adopted children in Ireland or abroad.

The 'Hands On' television programme have previously made an episode on fostering, adoption and IVF treatment. This programme is through Irish Sign Language (ISL) and is also subtitled.

<http://www.rte.ie/tv/handson/thisweek14122008.html>

Sexually Transmitted Infections

Lesbians have a low risk of contracting Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) however, they should still know how to protect themselves. Firstly, STIs are explained, then safe sex and how to protect ourselves.

What is an STI?

Sexually Transmitted Infection (STI) is another name for Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STD). Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs) are diseases that are mainly passed from one person to another during sex. Most STDs will only affect you if you have sexual contact with someone who has an STD.

Chlamydia

This is one of the most commonly reported bacterial STDs. It infects the urethra, rectum and eyes in both sexes and the cervix in women. It is transmitted through contact with the fluid of an infected person. It can be passed on the fingers to the eyes or genitals. It can cause swollen genitals in men and bleeding in between periods in women. Usually most people have no symptoms at all even though they have chlamydia. This is why it is also called 'The Silent Infection.'

Genital Warts

This can appear on the skin anywhere in the genital area as small whitish or flesh-coloured bumps, which can develop into larger, fleshy, cauliflower-like lumps. They are unlikely to cause pain but may itch and can be difficult to spot. There are no other symptoms of genital warts, but if a woman has a wart on her cervix she may experience slight bleeding or unusually coloured vaginal discharge. Genital warts can be passed from skin to skin contact with the wart.

Gonorrhoea

This can affect the urethra, cervix, rectum, anus and throat. The symptoms are a burning feeling when urinating, a change in vaginal discharge. This can be passed through genital contact with an infected person

Herpes

Genital herpes is a contagious viral infection affecting primarily the genitals. Genital herpes is characterised by recurrent clusters of vesicles and lesions at the genital areas or below the waist. These look like blisters and are very painful. Genital Herpes can be passed through skin to skin contact with the sore. For more information see <http://www.herpess.com>

Thrush

This is a yeast infection caused by the Candida species of fungus. Thrush is normally found on the skin and genitals of most people. If it causes itching or swelling it can be painful and uncomfortable to live with. In this case we would recommend you visit your chemist for treatment. Thrush can develop in the mouth after unprotected oral sex with someone.

Symptoms:

- itching
- irritation
- thick white discharge
- redness, soreness and swelling of the vagina, clitoris and vulva.

Lesbians and HIV

The most common way for lesbians and bi women to contract HIV is through unsafe sex with men, or sharing equipment during drug use (injecting). **HIV** stands for Human Immunodeficiency Virus

There is a very low risk of HIV being passed from woman to woman through sex. However, women should still know how to protect themselves, see below. If a woman has HIV, the virus is found in her blood, breast milk, and vaginal fluid. It is important to note that HIV is also present in anal fluid and menstrual blood. HIV can be passed from mother to child during pregnancy, birth and when breast feeding.

Safer Sex

Lesbians are at a lower risk of getting (STIs) however, they should still know how to protect themselves.

What is safe sex?

Lesbian women can use a latex barrier when having sex, particularly if they are worried about contracting an STI, or HIV.

Get a test:

You may have an STD and not know it, it is important to get checked out by your local doctor/clinic. You can also get tested for HIV either by your local GP or Sexual Health Clinic. For more information the following website is available - www.hivireland.ie

Safe Sex:

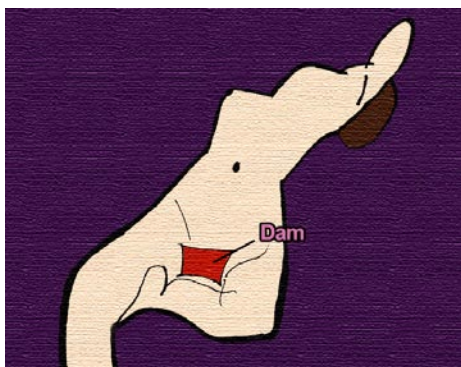
- If you use sex toys, use a new condom or wash the toys with soap and water before and after having sex and between switching who uses it.
- If you have cuts in your mouth, use a dental dam.
- If you have cold sores, use a dental dam, or you may be vulnerable to getting HIV.
- If you have a cut on your finger use latex gloves and wash your hands before and after sex.
- Check with your partner if they have a STD.

Dental Barrier

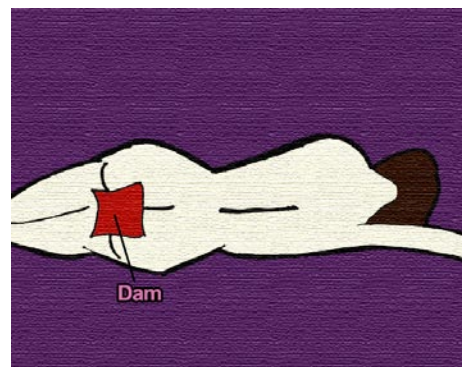
A dental barrier is a bit like a condom. It is a small and thin square piece of rubber (Latex) that some lesbians like to use for oral sex. It protects the mouth, lips and tongue. It covers the vagina, vulva and/or anus. It is also called a Glyde or a dental dam. It can help to protect people from the risk of contracting STIs. Many dental dams have different smells and colours, such as strawberry (pink), blueberry (purple) or vanilla (cream).

Image:

http://www.mckinley.illinois.edu/Handouts/latex_squares/latex_squares.html



Front



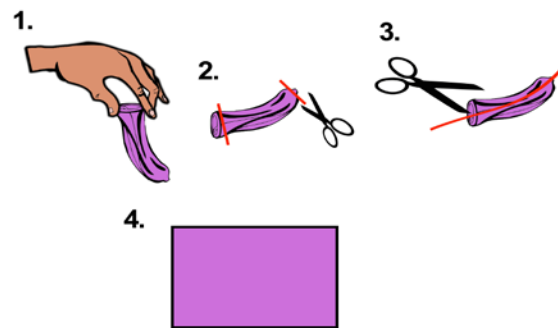
Back

Reduce the risk of STIs

- Use a dental barrier
- Safer Sex
- Check the before date on female condoms
- Don't use baby oil, massage oil with rubber/latex products, use water based lubes.

Where can I get a dental dam?

Look in your chemist shop, health clinic or order online. A dental dam costs approximately €1 - €3, depending on the size and smell. If you can't find one don't worry, you can make your own.



How to make a Dental Dam?

It is easy to make your own dental dam by cutting a male condom.

1. Get a male condom
2. Be careful to use the right side
3. Using a scissors, cut off the top and bottom of the condom, then cut down the length of the condom
4. Make into a square sheet

Image: <http://std.about.com/od/oralsex/tips/ig/make-a-dental-dam/dam-final-1.htm>



Picture sourced from Google Images – dental dam.

You can also get female condoms. For more information check - http://www.redribbonproject.com/4_safer_sex_and_contraception.html

Sex Terms

Butch – Lesbian who looks or acts masculine

Baby Butch – Young butch lesbian, boyish

Baby Dyke – Young lesbian

Bisexual - A person who is sexually and/or emotionally attracted to men *and* women

Cunnilingus – See oral sex. Cunnilingus is using a mouth on a vagina.

Dyke – Used to be a put-down word, now slang for lesbian, sometimes implies butch

Female Ejaculation (squirting) – Sometimes women produce lots of clear watery fluid just before orgasm

Femme – Lesbian woman who looks or acts feminine

Fingering – Touching another women's vagina with fingers

Finger-fucking – Using fingers inside a vagina

Fisting – Putting a fist or all four fingers completely inside a vagina

Fucking – Using fingers or sex toy inside the vagina

G-Spot – The small area on the front inner wall of the vagina about 2 inches up, gives intense pleasure. Also called the para-urethral gland.

Gender Identity – how you identify your gender, i.e. woman, transgendered, gender queer, man.

Heterosexual – (straight) woman who is sexually and/or emotionally attracted to men

Lesbian - Woman who is sexually and/or emotionally attracted to another woman

Lesbian boy – Lesbian whose style is to look like a boy

Oral Sex – Licking the vagina / clitoris / vulva

Orgasm – An orgasm is a way your body feels when enjoying having sex

Rimming – Licking your partner's anus

Sex Toys – are dildos, vibrators etc.

Sexuality – is the way you express your sexual self.

Sexual Orientation – how you identify who you are attracted to, i.e. heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual.

STI – (or STD) stands for Sexually Transmitted Infections/Diseases. They can be transmitted through sexual activity.

Tribadism – Two women rubbing vulva / clitoris together

Smear Tests

What is a smear test?

A smear test is an investigation to check the women's cervix (neck of the womb). The doctor or nurse will put a plastic or metal instrument (speculum) into the vagina and will take a small sample test of cells from the cervix. If your smear test result says abnormal cells (not healthy) were found, this does not mean you have cancer, it might be an early sign that cells in the cervix have changed and it is something to keep an eye on. The doctor will advise you what to do next.

What happens during smear test?

- The doctor or nurse will ask you to take off your underwear and jeans/pants.
- If you are not comfortable with your male doctor, you can ask for female doctor / nurse.
- You will be asked to lie down on your back with your knees bent and legs open
- The doctor or nurse will insert a plastic or metal instrument into the vagina, take cells from the cervix, and put them into a glass tube.
- It is more comfortable if you relax. If you are tense, this makes it more uncomfortable.
- If you feel a bit sore, tell the doctor / nurse. However most of the time it shouldn't be painful.
- The cells will be sent to a laboratory and will be examined with a microscope to check if there are any problems.
- The test is very short and should only take about 5 minutes.

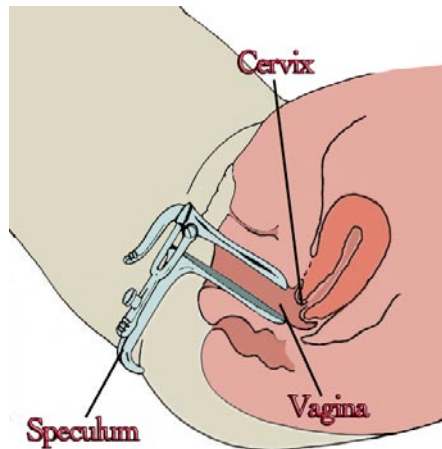


Image from <http://www.answers.com/topic/pelvic-exam-and-pap-smear>

Who should have a smear test?

Most women aged 25 to 60 will have a regular smear test (every 3 - 5 years).
Lesbians and bi women should have a smear test too.

How often should I have a smear test?

Women aged 25-44 should have a smear test every 3 years. Women aged 45 to 60 should have a smear test every 5 years.

Reduce Risks

- Regular smear tests show early warning signs
- Stop smoking
- If you may have vaginal bleeding, spotting or discharge get it checked by a doctor.

Results

Your results will be sent to you by post within 4 weeks. Most results are normal.
Please don't panic if you are called back for another test.

If your results are not successful, you may have to go for another free smear test or more investigation of cells using a microscope. This is called a colposcopy.

How to get a smear test?

- Visit local GP
- Family Planning Clinic
- Well Woman Centre or Women's health clinic.

You can register for a cervical smear test on this website - www.cervicalcheck.ie. Cervical checks are provided free for women aged 25 to 60 (government funding).

Information sourced from Cervical Check www.cervicalcheck.ie

Breast Cancer Awareness

Lesbians have the same risk of developing breast cancer as heterosexual women. It's very important to be aware of your breasts and check for any changes.

What is Breast Cancer?

Breast cancer is a type of cancer that starts growing in the breast cells (breast, nipple and armpit area) and can spread to other areas of the body.

What is mammogram?

A mammogram is a special x-ray of the breast. It is used to check for any problem with a women's breast.

There is a higher risk of getting breast cancer due to -

- Never giving birth
- Family history
- Alcohol and smoking
- Diet – High in fat
- Age – risk of cancer grows as age increases
- Overweight (lack of exercise)
- The contraceptive pill (for a long time)
- HRT – Hormone Replacement Therapy

Warning Signs!

Any change in the appearance of your breast, such as:

- Thickening or a lump in the breast
- Discharge from nipple
- Different size breasts – one is noticeably larger than the other one
- Change in shape / skin
- Swelling or lump in your armpit
- Painful breast

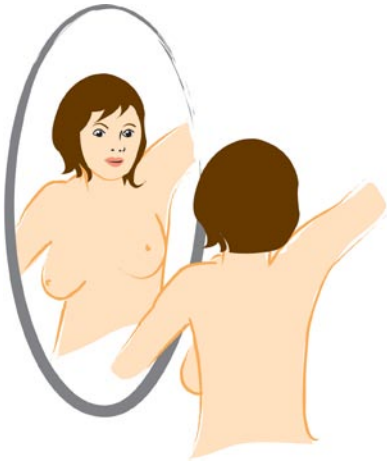
How to lower the risks of getting breast cancer?

- Have a low fat diet
- Less / no alcohol (4 drinks per week)

- Check your breasts often (at least once a month)
- Quit smoking
- Exercise more

You should meet your local doctor if you are worried. Or contact Action Breast Cancer by emailing: abc@irishcancer.ie or see their website for more information
- <http://www.cancer.ie/action/>

How to do a breast examination



Look at your breast using a mirror.

(Watch out for different size, shape, colour, dimpling, puckering, redness, swelling, etc)



Use your fingers to check your breast.

(Watch out for any lump, nipple changes, discharge, etc)



An examination can also be done in the shower



Or when lying down

Image information: <http://www.positivelypink.es/index.php?call=gencontent&s=8>

Menopause

Menopause is a normal stop to your menstrual cycle (period). The production of the oestrogen and progesterone hormones comes to an end. Most women over the age of 50 no longer become pregnant.

If a woman reached menopause before age 45 this is called Premature Menopause. Premature Menopause can be a difficult time and it is important to look for advice.

Some women can reach menopause due to cancer treatment or because of gynecological (women's) problems.

- Removal of womb / ovaries (Hysterectomy)
- Chemotherapy
- Radiotherapy

Signs of Menopause

There can be physical or emotional changes -

- Hot flushes (body temperature control)
- Night sweats
- Mood swings (depression, worried, difficulty coping)
- Vaginal dryness
- Insomnia (difficulty sleeping)
- Urinary infections
- Irregular periods

Look after yourself during and after menopause

- Exercise
- Eat healthy
- Quit Smoking
- Take care of your body and relax

What is HRT?

HRT means Hormone Replacement Therapy. Some women take HRT to help with the symptoms of menopause. HRT provides extra support to keep your body's hormone levels constant. It helps to relieve the symptoms caused by a fall in hormone levels – hot flushes, vaginal dryness listed above. Some reports say that HRT increases the risk of:

- coronary heart disease
- breast cancer
- blood clots

Studies are ongoing so information is constantly changing. It is very important to talk your doctor for up to date facts. You will need to check with your doctor about HRT to find out if it is suitable for you. The doctor will give you plenty of advice on the topic.

Information sourced from Health Promotion

http://www.healthpromotion.ie/fs/doc/hpu_publications/HPM00069

Mental Health

Mental Health is emotional and psychological well-being. This is a very important issue for lesbians. Homophobia is powerful and sometimes very subtle. Whether you have come out to family and friends or not, lesbians may sometimes feel isolated and alone. These negative emotions can sometimes lead to mental health problems such as depression, anxiety (worry), or eating disorders and alcoholism, among other things.

- Exclusion from family or friends: When you come out as a lesbian to your family or friends, they may not have fully accepted your sexuality, which can make you feel alone and misunderstood.
- Lack of support or accessibility: If you are looking for information about coming out, and you don't know where to go, this can make you feel sad, depressed and helpless.
- Suicide: Whether or not you are "out" sometimes the pressures of life in a homophobic world get too much for us to bear. People respond to these pressures in different ways, depression, self-harming, or in extreme cases: suicide.

If you are feeling down, depressed or alone, it is better to look for help. If you find someone you can talk to it might prevent the situation getting worse and be good for your mental health.

There are ways that can help you to look after your emotional health:

- Keep active.
- Get out and involved with projects, groups and activities in the community.
- Eat well and drink sensibly.
- If you drink too much, too often, it can make you feel depressed.
- Be careful not to get too isolated; not too much time on your own.
- Do a hobby or something that you are good at so you can be proud of yourself.
- Talk to someone you can trust about how you are feeling.
- Talk to your friends and family and stay in touch with them.
- Ask for help if you are stuck.
- Believe in yourself and accept who you are.
- Take care of others, it'll make you feel better.

These are a few supportive organisations:

Gay Switchboard Dublin: gsd@iol.ie - this is a telephone line / helpline for anyone who is Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual that is having issues with their sexuality or with their family and friends. They listen to you and give you support.

OutHouse: This is a LGBTQ community centre which has a café and meeting rooms. Their address is 105 Capel Street, Dublin 1. You can visit Outhouse or look at their website for more information. www.outhouse.ie

Equality and Visibility Everywhere: Dublin based group providing a supportive space for lesbians and bi women. The group is in Outhouse. Email: contactevenow@hotmail.com

Lesbian Line Dublin: A telephone helpline for lesbians, operating every Thursday night at 7pm - 9pm, to listen to you and support you. www.dublinlesbianline.ie

Drugs, Alcohol and Smoking

There is a high rate of smoking, drinking and drug use in the LGBT community. People sometimes think that alcohol and drugs help to relieve the stress and hurt caused by homophobia. There's also the added pressure of meeting new people in gay pubs and some people feel that if they drink or take drugs they will be more confident. There are many LGBT clubs/organisations that provide a safe place for a social night out. It is important that lesbians find ways to have fun with each other that does not involve taking drugs or drinking too much alcohol.

Alcohol – Drinking too much alcohol can increase the risk of developing diabetes, liver disease and heart disease. Drinking can effect your judgment and decision making around issues such as keeping yourself safe and thinking clearly.

Drugs – The drugs which are taken most often on the LGBT scene in Ireland are, ecstasy, cocaine, marijuana and amyl nitrate (poppers). Taking drugs can increase your risk of having a heart attack, stroke among other health risks. They can cloud your judgment leading you to take dangerous risks. Sharing needles for injecting drugs is a very high risk way to catch HIV / AIDS.

Smoking – there are many lesbians who smoke tobacco. If you smoke regularly there is an increased risk of developing cancer, lung problems, throat problems and so on.

Information sourced from

GLEN (Gay and Lesbian Equality Network)

<http://www.glen.ie/press/docs/Press%20Release%20%20HSE%20LGBT%20Report%20May%2009.doc>

NHS from UK

<http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/LGBhealth/Pages/Addictionandalcohol.aspx>



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Physical, Emotional and Sexual Abuse in Same-Sex Couples

A high percentage of women experience physical, emotional or sexual abuse during their lifetime. Lesbians and bi women are no different.

Domestic violence (in the home, by your partner or family) is an example of abusive behaviour. This includes when someone tries to control the thoughts and beliefs of the other person. It can happen between lesbians and bi women living together or dating. The abuser generally wants power and to be in control. There can also be anger management problems. Sometimes the relationship becomes violent.

It is important to find a healthcare provider (clinic) to talk to and receive advice about abuse issues. Many people feel that there is no point in visiting their GP because they feel they don't understand about LGBT issues. Maybe in some cases this is true, however some people might know their GP well enough to talk to them. Other places to get help are: Women's Aid, Lesbian Line, Gay and Lesbian Equality Network (GLEN), BelongTo and Red Ribbon Project for support and advice.

Different kinds of abuse:

Physical

- Push you
- Slap or Bite you
- Hitting, kicking or choking you
- Punching
- Hurt you with a weapon
- Lock partner out of house
- Abuser controls all activities
- Not allow you to have accessibility: wheelchairs, hearing aids, and so on.

Emotional

- Calling you bad names / shouting (e.g. too fat, stupid, bad lover)
- Making you feel guilty
- Keeping you away from your friends / family
- Refuse to go on social nights with you
- Threaten to hurt you or your family
- If your partner puts you down in public
- Threatening to leave or throw you out of the house
- Serious jealousy / blaming

Sexual

- Forced / pushed to have sex
- Forced to have sex after a beating / use of weapons
- Uncomfortable touching

Information sourced from

IrishHealth.com <http://www.irishhealth.com/article.html?id=14997>

Oregon Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence
http://www.ocadsv.com/OCADSV_WhatYouShouldKnow_DomesticViolence.asp

Clackmamas Women's Services <http://www.cwsor.org/info.htm>



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Rape and Sexual Assault

If you have been raped or sexually assaulted (touching, oral penetration, forced kissing etc) you may be in shock and not know what to do. It is important to go to your GP or hospital for an examination as soon as possible. If you want to report the assault to the police it is best to go to a hospital that has Sexual Assault Treatment Unit (SATU). If you are unsure what to do you should contact your local Rape Crisis Centre (www.rcni.ie) for information and advice. When the hospital examines you they will check for any injuries and will test you for Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs). You may also be pregnant and need to know what options are available.

If the assault has just happened and you are going for a medical and forensic examination (sperm, blood etc), remember:

Do not wash beforehand.

If you were assaulted in your mouth, do not eat, drink, smoke or use toothpaste or mouthwash before samples have been taken from your mouth area.

Do not take drugs or alcohol beforehand.

Do not wash the clothes you were wearing at the time of the assault. Take them with you if you have changed or take a change of clothes with you as your clothes may be kept for examination and evidence.

(Information sourced from www.rcni.ie/medical-care.aspx)

The person who committed the rape/assault may be a stranger, your partner, a friend or family member. Assault affects people in different ways, you may feel shocked, depressed, have flashbacks (remembering what happened) or panic. It is important you contact your local Rape Crisis Centre. Dublin Rape Crisis Centre (www.drcc.ie) provide many services, such as:

- One to one counselling (first six crisis visits are free, then there is a fee depending on how much you can afford to pay)
- Advice about your options
- Attend the police or court with you.

If the rape or sexual assault has happened a long time ago, or in your childhood, you can also visit your local rape crisis centre to find out what services they can offer you. If you want counselling, you can ask about having an interpreter.

Remember, it is best to look for advice and information and not deal with such a traumatic experience by yourself.

Contact List

Support and Information

BeLonG To, Parliament House, 13 Parliament Street, Dublin 2, Ireland
Tel: 01 670 6223
Fax: 01 670 2619
Email: info@belongto.org
Web: www.belongto.org

Dublin Rape Crisis Centre, 70, Lower Leeson Street, Dublin 2, Ireland
Office Hours: Mon - Fri - 8.00am to 7.00pm
Sat - 9.00am - 4.00pm
Tel: 01 661 4911
Freephone: 1 800 778 888
Fax: 01 661 0873
Email: rcc@indigo.ie
Web: www.drcc.ie

The Dublin Rape Crisis Centre operates a 24 hour telephone helpline, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. The phone line is *never* closed.

They will reply to your email within 24 hours during the business week. Please direct all counselling-related queries to the freephone line.

Dundalk Outcomers, The Coach House, 8 Roden Place, Dundalk, Co. Louth
Tel: 042 9329816 / youth & young adult: 086 1625030
Helpline: 042 9353035
Fax: 042 9329816
Email: info@outcomers.org
Contact Bernardine at: bernardine@outcomers.org
Contact John at: youth@outcomers.org
Web: www.outcomers.org

GLEN - Gay and Lesbian Equality Network, 2 Exchange Street Upper, Dublin 8, Ireland
Tel: 01 6728650
Email: info@glen.ie
Web: www.glen.ie

Irish Cancer Society (Action Breast Cancer), 43/45 Northumberland Road, Dublin 4
Tel: 01 2310 500
Fax: 01 2310 555
Email: info@irishcancer.ie

Web: www.cancer.ie

LASI Lesbian Advocacy Services Initiative, 2nd Floor, 9-13 Waring Street, Belfast BT1 2DX

Tel: 048 90249452

Email: info@lasionline.org

Web: www.lasionline.org

Outhouse - Community Resource Centre, 105 Capel Street, Dublin 1

Tel: 01 8734932

Fax: 01 8650090

SMS: 087 7602571

Email: info@outhouse.ie

Web: www.outhouse.ie

Queer Community Support Worker

Red Ribbon Project, Redwood House, 9 Cecil Street, Limerick, Ireland

Tel: 061 314354

Mob: 087 2192848

Fax: 061 315024

Email: billie@redribbonproject.com

Web: www.redribbonproject.com

Rape Crisis Network Ireland (RCNI), The Halls, Quay Street, Galway, Ireland

Tel: 091 563676

Fax: 091 563677

Email: info@rcni.ie

Web: www.rcni.ie

(Please contact RCNI for details of your local Rape Crisis Centre)

The Sexual Health Centre, 16 Peter's Street, Cork City, Ireland

Tel: 021 427583

Fax: 021 4274370

Email: info@sexualhealthcentre.com

Web: www.sexualhealthcentre.com

Cervical Check

The National Cervical Screening Programme provides free smear tests to women aged 25 to 60. Please contact your local GP for appointment.

www.cervicalcheck.ie

Hospitals and STI Clinics

STI screening is free of charge and confidential at any of the following locations.

No email or fax numbers provided. Please make an appointment, there may be a waiting list.

Youth Health Service, Cork City 021 422 0490/1
 GUIDE Clinic, St. James Hospital, Dublin 8 01 4162 315
 Mater Hospital, Dublin 7 01 8032 063
 Regional Hospital, Waterford City 051 842 646
 General Hospital, Clonmel, Co. Tipperary 051 842 646
 District Hospital, Carlow 051 842 646
 Victoria Hospital, Cork City 021 4966 844
 Regional Hospital, Tralee, Co. Kerry 021 4966 844
 Regional Hospital, Limerick City 061 482 382
 General Hospital, Nenagh, Co. Tipperary 061 482 382
 General Hospital, Ennis, Co. Clare 061 482 382
 General Hospital, Castlebar, Co. Mayo 094 9021 733 (extension 2456)
 University Hospital, Galway City 091 525 200
 Portiuncula Hospital, Ballinasloe, Co. Galway 090 9648 372 (extension 676)
 Regional Hospital, Sligo Town 071 9170 473
 Altnagalvin Hospital, Derry City 028 71 611 269 (048 from Rol)
 Coleraine Hospital, Co. Derry 028 703 460248 (048 from Rol)
 Royal Victoria Hospital, Belfast City 028 90 634 050 (048 from Rol)
 Daisy Hill Hospital, Newry, Co. Down 028 3083 5050 (048 from Rol)

Well Woman Centres

Women's Health check-ups - including sexual health.

Check website for fees - www.wellwomancentre.ie. Most Well Woman services are offered by appointment only. To make an appointment, contact one of the centres.

67, Pembroke Road (basement), Ballsbridge, Dublin 4

Tel: 01 660 9860

01 668 1108

01 668 3714

Fax: 01 660 3062

35 Lower Liffey Street, Dublin 1

Tel: 01 872 8051

01 872 8095

Fax: 01 872 8466

(Walk-in Emergency Contraception Clinic)

Northside Shopping Centre, Coolock, Dublin 5

Tel: 01 848 4511

Fax: 01 848 4264

For more information on fostering and adoption

www.adoptionireland.com
www.citizensinformation.ie
www.fostering.ie

Mental Health

Mental Health Ireland
Mensana House,
6 Adelaide Street,
Dun Laoghaire,
Co. Dublin

Email: info@mentalhealthireland.ie
Tel: (01) 284 1166
Fax: (01) 284 1736
Website: <http://www.mentalhealthireland.ie>

Aware:
72 Lower Leeson Street,
Dublin 2.
Lo-Call: 1890 303 302 (helpline only)
Tel: (01) 661 7211
Fax: (01) 661 7217
E-mail: aware@iol.ie

References

Website information:

HSE: www.healthpromotion.ie

Prescription for Change – Lesbian and bisexual women’s Health
www.stonewall.org.uk/lesbianhealth

LASI: www.lasionline.org

Red Ribbon Project: www.redribbonproject.com/

Novo Nordisk Ireland
http://www.novonordisk.ie/documents/article_page/document/hrt_facts.asp

Belong2:
www.belongto.org/

Dundalk Outcomers:
<http://www.outcomers.org/page.aspx?pageid=182>

Cervical Check: www.cervicalcheck.ie

NHS Bolton:
<http://www.bolton.nhs.uk/Library/Leaflets/patient/Lesbian%20Smear%20Guide.pdf>

Action Breast Cancer: <http://www.cancer.ie/action/>

Medicine.Net: http://www.medicinenet.com/breast_cancer/page3.htm

BreastCancer.Org: <http://www.breastcancer.org/>

Cancer Research UK
http://publications.cancerresearchuk.org/WebRoot/crukstoredb/CRUK_PDFs/ED072B.pdf

Lesbian and Cancer:
<http://kc.csip.org.uk/viewdocument.php?action=viewdox&pid=0&doc=37912&grp=446>

For all women who love women... breast or cervical cancer?
www.ilga-europe.org/content/download/.../1/.../BreastBrochureENFinal.pdf