



Preparing for your Appointment

QUICK LINKS

- [Part 1](#) Getting the Most out of your Appointment
- [Part 2](#) Preparing for an Appointment
- [Part 3](#) What to Say and How to Say It
- [Part 4](#) Getting to Know your Rights
- [Part 5](#) Questions You Might Ask Your Healthcare Provider
- [Part 6](#) Questions Your Provider Might Ask You
- [Part 7](#) How to Explore Payment with a Healthcare Provider

Getting the most out of your appointment

Seeing a healthcare provider is an important part of leading a healthy and balanced life. Whether you have symptoms you want checked out, questions about a condition or medication, or even if you're just looking for a check-up—it's important that you feel safe, comfortable, and confident talking to your provider.

Young and LGBTQ+ people have complicated relationships with the healthcare system. Maybe this is your first time seeing a general practitioner, and you aren't sure what questions to ask. Maybe you want to talk to your doctor about sexuality or gender identity, but you haven't brought that stuff up with anyone else in your life yet. Maybe you're feeling a little uncertain about what a healthcare provider might ask you about, or what they do with your information.

These are all valid concerns and it's totally ok to feel this way. In fact, many other LGBTQ+ youth struggle with similar concerns, and we are here to help.

This Guide will go over some of the steps that you can take to get the most out of your appointment with a healthcare provider. We will give you some helpful information on how to prepare for an appointment, how to talk to providers, what kinds of sensitive information providers might ask you about, how to pay, and which legal protections are in place to safeguard your privacy.

If you don't have a healthcare provider at the moment, consult our guide on [Finding a LGBTQ+ Service Provider](#) to start your journey.

Preparing for an Appointment

The first thing to do when preparing for an appointment is to book it! When you call, try asking questions about what you should bring along, how long the appointment might take, and what else you should expect. You can also request a shorter or longer appointment based on your individual health needs.

No matter what how old you are, going to the doctor or clinic can feel stressful. You might find it helpful to get a few things organized before your visit to make sure everything runs smoothly. Below you'll find some ideas about what to bring along with you:

THINGS TO BRING

1. A place to keep all of your important health information

It's never a bad idea to gather all of your important health documents, records, and identification before a visit. Your healthcare provider might want to see things like a health card (if you have one), vaccination records, a list of medications you're currently taking, an insurance card (if you have one), or other documents. Consider putting all this information into a single envelope or folder to keep things organized! If you're not sure which information is important to bring along, you can always call ahead and ask.

2. A pen and notepad

These items can help you keep track of advice, instructions, or other important information your provider might give you during the appointment. You can also take notes on your smartphone, if you have one.

3. An agenda

You will want somewhere to mark down any follow up appointments that you schedule during your visit. You can also use the calendar in your smartphone, if you have one.

4. A list of prepared questions

Before arriving at your appointment, it can be really helpful to sit down and think about why you are booking an appointment in the first place. Use this time to reflect on what questions you have for your healthcare provider and be sure to write them down. Prioritize your list of questions so you know what to get to first. If you want, you can even read your questions aloud during the appointment or show the list to your provider. Remember, no question is off limits. You have the right to understand your health concerns no matter what they might be, and your provider should be there to help.

5. A friend, sibling, or trusted adult?

Bringing someone along for support helps a lot of us feel safer and more comfortable before, during, and after an appointment. It can be nice to have someone to chat with in the waiting room or to bring along if you have a prescription to fill once your appointment is over. If you are comfortable going alone, that can also feel really affirming and empowering. Make the choice that is right for you.

6. Parents?

While many young people prefer to have their parents be present at appointments, there might be things you want to discuss with a provider that you don't want your parents to know (for example - sexual activity or drug use). If you bring up wanting to see a healthcare provider with your parents, you might ask them if it's ok that you go to the appointment alone. Sharing a general reason for why you want to do this, such as wanting to learn how to seek healthcare as an independent young person, might help them understand. You could also have your parents take you, but ask that they wait in the waiting room or outside for you.

If your parent insists on coming with you, and you're finding it difficult to get time alone with your provider, it might be better to try reaching out to your provider at a different time. You could try an email or phone call, to discuss what you can't when a parent is around. Finally, there are many types of services, treatments, and appointments you can get without the knowledge or consent of a parent/guardian. If you're wondering what these are, ask your individual provider. Generally, your provider is not allowed to tell your parents anything about your appointment unless you give permission, although there are some exceptions to these rules.

What to Say and How to Say It - Communication and Conduct at an Appointment

Expressing our healthcare needs to a provider is a skill, and like any skill it takes practice! But many people, regardless of age, find this pretty challenging. Below, we've listed a few tips and tricks you can follow to improve your communication with a healthcare provider and build a trusting relationship. Remember, every provider-patient interaction is different. Pick and choose the tips that work best for you, and feel free to adapt them as you see fit:

1. Be as clear and detailed as you can with a provider

Approach your appointment with a sense of what you want to get out of it. Writing down your questions beforehand can really help with this. When you ask your questions, try to do so with as much clarity as possible. For instance, if your arm is hurting, try not to be vague and say "my arm is hurting," but instead be more specific about your symptoms. Where is your arm hurting? When did it start hurting? How much does the pain impact your ability to go about your day? Being clear and detailed with your provider so they can better understand what's going on.

2. Be considerate and respectful of your provider

It's very common for people to feel nervous at an appointment. When our health is in question, it can be hard not to get emotional or even frustrated when we feel like someone isn't hearing us. If your provider doesn't seem to understand your concerns, be patient and stay calm. Take a breath and try repeating yourself or rephrasing your question/thought. Remember, your health is a priority and your provider is supposed to be there to help. Sometimes it just takes a few tries for both of you to get on the same page.

3. This is your health

Your provider should be considerate and respectful towards you too: your health counts. Part of being an empowered patient is advocating for your needs. Try your best to speak up if you have questions. Remember, you can ask for clarification as many times as it takes for you to understand exactly what is going on. It's ok if you don't feel totally comfortable doing this alone. Another reason why it can be helpful to bring a friend, parent, or trusted community member to an appointment is that they help advocate on your behalf.

4. Be open and honest with your provider

Your provider can most effectively help you when you're totally honest about your health needs. Remember, anything you tell your provider should be kept between the two of you and shouldn't be shared without your permission. You can always ask where and how your personal health information stored and used.

Try not to be afraid or embarrassed to talk to your provider about anything. This is your health we're talking about – so no topic should be off limits. Unfortunately, we live in a world where many LGBTQ+ people continue to face [heterosexism] and [transphobia], even in healthcare. This can make it difficult to be totally "open and honest" with our providers, and requires many of us to ask tricky questions like: *"Should I come out to my healthcare provider?"*

The short answer is – it depends. Coming out is a totally different process for everyone. You have to think about your safety, readiness, and comfort when considering coming out to a healthcare provider.

Here's the long answer: For LGBTQ+ patients, being open about sex and sexual health with a healthcare provider is a very common concern. Some LGBTQ+ people don't disclose this kind of information because of past negative experiences or fear of discrimination. These worries can feel even more complicated for LGBTQ+ youth, who may have never talked about sexuality and gender identity with anyone in their lives, let alone a healthcare provider.

But there are lots of reasons why you might want to come out to your provider. Health is about the whole person, and so the more your provider knows about you the better they will be at giving you the best, most appropriate treatment possible. This can mean screening you for certain types of illnesses that are more common in your community, helping refer you to specialists, or just being generally sensitive to your particular health needs as an LGBTQ+ patient.

The bottom line is: coming out is different for everyone. Some LGBTQ+ people don't want to come out to their doctor until after they have come out to their friends or family. Some LGBTQ+ people come out to their doctors first, maybe because they have specific questions about sexual health or gender identity. Every single LGBTQ+ person has their own unique story, and coming out happens at different points for different people. Even though it can feel really overwhelming, give some thought to what decision is right for you. Are you ready to come out? Who is the first person you want to tell? Is your current healthcare provider someone you feel comfortable sharing that information with? If not, who is? You are the author of your own story, and only you can decide when, where, and how to come out.

Getting to Know your Rights: Patient Privacy, Confidentiality, and Consent

Part of establishing a trusting and beneficial relationship with your healthcare provider is understanding how they will protect your personal health information. There are legal rights in place to make sure this information is secure. Privacy, confidentiality, and consent are three important rights that you are always entitled to as a patient.

Privacy means that your personal dealings with a provider should be protected from others. For instance, no one else besides you and your doctor should be in the room during a medical examination, unless you bring someone in (like a family member or a friend). Sometimes doctors are mentoring medical students or want another medical professional (like a nurse) to be present, so they might ask if it's ok that they sit in on your appointment. You have the right to say no if that makes you uncomfortable.

Confidentiality means that your important health information and documents can't be shared with anyone else without your permission. For example, test results, certain diagnoses, prescriptions, or other personal health information cannot be shared unless you say it's ok (in most cases you will have to sign something at the beginning of an appointment). With that said, sometimes doctors might talk to one another to share ideas on how to give the best possible care. In that case, there are rules where they are not allowed to share information that might identify you, like your name or where you live.

Informed Consent means permission. According to the law, you must give consent for the collection, use, and sharing of your personal health information.

There are certain exceptions to confidentiality, which may vary based on where you are from and the policies in place at your doctor's office. These exceptions are in place to protect your health and the health of the public. For instance, in some places, healthcare providers are legally required to report certain diagnoses to larger public health organizations so that they are able to monitor new infections and control potential outbreaks. Remember, you have a right to know where and to whom your private health information is circulated. You can ask your provider about this at any point during an appointment. For example, before getting a test you might ask "where will the results of this test be shared?" If you're not comfortable with the answer, you can always ask if there are other options.

Generally speaking, doctors are obligated to share personal health information if:

- They believe a child is being abused or hurt by someone in their life.

- Someone has a condition that may make it dangerous to drive
- Someone has been diagnosed with a communicable disease
 - Many provinces or states have laws that require the reporting of new cases of STIs like gonorrhea, Chlamydia, Syphilis, HIV/AIDS, and Hep A, Hep B, and Hep C to larger public health units. Oftentimes, they report it so the government knows how to respond to these issues, and put money in different programs that might help reduce these cases. Your name might be attached to this information, depending on whether you tested anonymously.

Minor Consent to Treatment: If you are under 18 (or 19, depending on where you are from), you can generally consent to your own medical care as long as you are considered “capable”. The term “capable” is a legal term that basically means that you understand what you’re consenting to. This can allow you to get sexual health services, STI testing, and other forms of care without express permission from a parent or guardian. Once again, different states, provinces, and even doctor’s offices have different standards about how old you have to be in order to be considered “capable.” Try searching “[state or province you live in] minor consent to treatment laws” and see what comes up.

Curious about privacy, confidentiality, and consent? Regardless of how old you are, you’re entitled to clear information about the laws and policies related to your personal health information. If you are unsure about giving your healthcare provider a certain piece of information, it never hurts to ask them some questions. Here are some ideas:

- Where is this information stored?
- Who has access to this information?
- Can you tell me what happens with my test results? Who do you call?
- Can I tell this to you in confidence?
- Is there any information that you have to tell my parents?
- Can you keep this off my medical record?

Questions You Might Ask Your Healthcare Provider

As patients, we should try to remember that our healthcare providers cannot read our minds. If you came to your appointment to address a specific concern, your provider won’t necessarily know what questions you have unless you ask. As a partner in your healthcare, try your best to speak up and ask whatever questions you feel are important. Below you will find a helpful list of questions you might want to ask your provider while you’re at an appointment.

Questions to Ask if you’ve Received a Diagnosis:

- How will this diagnosis impact my day-to-day life?
- How will this diagnosis affect my long-term health?
- Could you provide me with some informational resources (pamphlets, websites) so that I can better understand this diagnosis?
- Can I give this illness to someone else? Can I pass it on? How long am I contagious for?
- What can I do to prevent or treat this problem?

TIP: Getting a diagnosis can feel overwhelming. Take whatever steps you need to process this information safely and comfortably. For some people, that might mean taking some time to think things over before asking your provider these questions. For others, it might mean asking as many questions and getting as much information as possible during your appointment. Make the choice that feels right for you.

Questions to Ask About Medication, Follow-up Visits, or Further Testing:

- How does the medication you've prescribed me work?
- What are the side effects of this medication?
- I'm sexually active and want to make sure I'm exploring my sexuality safely. Are there any medications or other precautions I should be taking (some examples are: PrEP, Oral Contraceptives, IUDs, Condoms/Barriers, etc...)? If so, are you able to prescribe them to me?
- Why is the medication you have prescribed me the best medication? Do other options exist?
- Are there any other tests or treatments I need to do during my appointment?
- What do I need to do immediately after this appointment (fill a prescription, get another test, schedule a follow-up visit, see a specialist)?

SPECIFIC QUESTIONS FOR SPECIFIC LGBTQ+ SUBGROUPS

Not all LGBTQ+ people have the same health needs. Depending on who you are, you might encounter specific health concerns. If you're unsure about what health issues are relevant to your community, try exploring these factsheets on the "Top Ten Issues to Discuss with Your Healthcare Provider," produced by Health Professional Advancing LGBTQ Equality (GLMA), which is one of the oldest and largest associations of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer healthcare professionals in the world. It's important to recognize that just because you identify with some experiences outlined in the factsheet doesn't mean all the issues listed apply to you. Everybody is different, but it might be helpful to get a sense of which health issues generally impact the LGBTQ+ community you identify with.

10 Things Lesbians Should Discuss with Their Healthcare Provider

<http://www.glma.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=Page.viewPage&pageID=691>

10 Things Gay Men Should Discuss with Their Healthcare Provider

<http://glma.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=Page.viewPage&pageID=690>

10 Things Bisexuals Should Discuss with Their Healthcare Provider

<http://glma.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=Page.ViewPage&PageID=1026>

10 Things Transgender Persons Should Discuss with Their Healthcare Provider

<http://www.glma.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=Page.viewPage&pageID=692>

Other Important Questions to Ask During your Visit:

- Can you tell me what you're doing?
- Can you explain why you're doing this procedure/test?
- What are you noticing as you're doing this procedure/test?
- I didn't understand what you said about this, can you repeat yourself or say it in a different way?
- Would you mind explaining that to me in simpler terms?
- What can I do at home to take care of myself?

TIP: The more questions you ask, the more you'll learn about your body and your health. This knowledge can help you take a more active and empowered role in your healthcare.

Questions Your Provider Might Ask You

Healthcare providers tend to ask a lot of questions. Even though some of these questions can feel really personal, try to remember that your provider is trying to get the big picture, so they can give you the best care they can. Be as open and honest as you can, but remember, you never have to answer a question you don't feel comfortable or safe answering. You reserve the right to your privacy, even in the presence of a healthcare provider.

Below you will find some examples of questions you might be asked by a healthcare provider. Remember, it's ok if you don't know the answer.

Questions about your general health:

- Why did you book an appointment today?
- How would you rate your general health?
- Are you experiencing any pain or irritation anywhere?
- Do you have a family history of any diseases?
- What vaccines have you received?
- Have you ever been hospitalized?
- Have you ever had surgery?
- Are you on any medications right now?
- Are you allergic to any medications?
- Do you see any other health providers? (like specialists, dieticians, physical therapists)?

Questions About Your Health Behaviours:

- Do you exercise?
- What is your diet like?
- Do you smoke or drink?
- Do you consume other substances?
- Do you wear sunscreen?

Questions About Your Mental Health:

- Have you ever been diagnosed with a mental health condition?
- Are you currently on any mental health medications (anti-depressants, anti-anxiety, mood stabilizers)?
- Do you see a therapist or counsellor?
- Do you ever feel anxious or depressed?
- Have you ever thought about hurting yourself?

Questions About Your Sexual Health:

- Are you sexually active? If so, what kinds of sexual activity are you engaging in?
- What methods of birth control or STI protection do you use?
- Have you ever been tested or treated for an STI?
- Have you had Gardasil or any other HPV vaccines?
- Have there been any recent sexual encounters where you did not use protection?
- How many sexual partners have you had?
- Do you currently have one partner? More than one partner?
- Are you in a relationship? What kind of relationship?
- Are you experiencing any pain or irritation in your genitalia?
 - For people with vaginas: have you recently noticed any change in your period or the quality of your vaginal discharge? When was your last period? When did you last have (or have you ever had) a PAP test? Have you ever been pregnant? Do you experience any pain during sex?
 - For people with penises: have you recently noticed any change in your penis? Is it painful to pee? Any discharge? Painful ejaculation?

How to Explore Payment with a Healthcare Provider

The cost of healthcare varies significantly based on where you are and what kind of care you're receiving. Thinking about costs can feel really overwhelming. Just remember that your health is always a priority. Never delay seeking help for an emergency because you are worried about how to pay. There should be systems in place to help you cover costs. Generally, you will fit into one of three categories:

1. You have private health insurance

This can come from your employer, your college/university, or your parent(s)/guardian(s). Different insurance plans will cover different costs. Many appointments, tests, and prescriptions might cost you a "co-pay," which means that you will have to cover a portion of the total cost, and the rest will be paid for by the insurance company. If you're unsure about your coverage, contact your insurance provider to ask about the particular procedure, test, or treatment you require.

TIP: If you plan on using a parent or guardian's insurance, they may receive a financial statement listing the medication, test, or procedure performed. If you are looking to get tested or treated for an STI without your parents/guardian knowing, there may be community clinics you can go to where the costs are mostly covered. Try searching "[name of your city] LGBT youth sexual health clinic" and call ahead with your questions.

2. You are the recipient of public health coverage

In some places, like Canada, the government will cover some or all of your healthcare expenses. While many public health plans offer complete coverage, some may exclude certain types of care or medications. Be sure to ask your provider if the test, treatment, or procedure they want to perform is covered under public health. Also, some healthcare providers operate privately, meaning all of the services they offer are paid for by patients without any help from the government. Be sure to check and see if a provider is public or private. This information should be readily available to you as a patient and consumer.

3. You have neither health insurance or public health coverage

If this is your case, you will need to find a clinic that allows you to pay for services using cash or a credit/debit card. You will also need to find the money to pay for services. We believe that healthcare is a universal human right, and understand that not having money can prevent you from seeking healthcare. However, there may be community resources that can help. There could be clinics or community health centres in your city that offer free services for youth and/or LGBTQ+ communities. Try searching "[name of your city] LGBT youth clinic" and see what comes up. To broaden your search, you can also try using only one of the search terms (either youth or LBGT) or just search "[name of your city] community health centre." Always be sure to call ahead to ask if there are any costs involved, including those for low-income patients.