

TEN THINGS EVERY LGBT OLDER ADULT SHOULD KNOW ABOUT HEART DISEASE

A close-up, black and white portrait of an older man with a receding hairline, looking slightly to the right of the camera. The image is partially obscured by the text on the left.

Heart disease refers to the various conditions that compromise the heart and vascular system’s abilities to pump blood in and out of the body’s passageways. As the body ages, the heart’s functioning begins to decline, pumping blood at slower rates and taking in less oxygen during strenuous activities—this decline puts older adults at a greater risk for heart attacks, heart disease, hypertension and stroke.

About Heart Disease

- 1 Heart disease has three main forms: coronary heart disease (or coronary artery disease), heart failure and heart arrhythmias.** Coronary heart disease is the most common form of heart disease among adults, with more than 15 million people affected in the U.S. Coronary heart disease occurs when the heart’s arteries fill up with plaque (fatty deposits), blocking the flow of blood from the heart and resulting in chest pain, shortness of breath, dizziness, numbness in the limbs, and, at its worst, heart attacks.
- 2 Heart disease can affect anyone, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity—and is the leading cause of death in the U.S.** While heart disease was once thought of as a “man’s disease,” clinical studies and research have show that people from all walks of life can be at risk for

heart disease, making regular medical check-ups that test blood pressure and cholesterol levels important for all older adults.

- 3 Certain risk factors put some people at a greater risk for heart disease.** 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.
- 4 According to the available research, LGBT older adults are especially vulnerable to heart disease due to poorer health outcomes.** Studies have shown that LGBT people are more likely than their heterosexual counterparts to be overweight, exercise less and have poorer diets, putting them at a heightened risk for developing heart disease and further diminishing their overall fitness levels.
- 5 Older adults of color are disproportionately at risk for heart disease, which is the leading cause of death for most racial and ethnic groups in the U.S.** This prevalence is partially attributed to higher rates of blood pressure, obesity and smoking among communities of color, as well as the lack of affordable, accessible, and culturally and linguistically appropriate health care. For example, the Office for Minority Health notes that communities of color often receive substandard health care from medical professionals, from basic miscommunication and overt prejudice and discrimination.

Take Charge of Your Health

- 6 Improving your diet and increasing your exercise can reduce the likelihood you'll develop heart disease.** Eating a low-sodium, low-fat diet that's rich in fruits and vegetables can lower high blood pressure and cholesterol levels, and reduce the dangerous accumulation of fatty deposits around the heart. Additionally, 30 minutes of exercise, such as walking, can also reduce cholesterol levels and increase your heart's strength.

- 7 Quitting smoking and avoiding smoking environments will improve your heart's health.** Smoking narrows the heart's arteries and constricts blood flow, quadrupling the risk of developing heart disease or having a stroke. Even second-hand smoke has been found to diminish heart health, provoke heart attacks and contribute to the early onset of heart disease.
- 8 Find ways to manage your stress.** High levels of stress can lead to high blood pressure, which can increase the likelihood of heart attacks. Take a walk, exercise, or talk to a loved one to reduce your stress level and prevent heart-complications.
- 9 Curb your alcohol consumption and your health will appreciate it.** The over-consumption of alcohol can lead to heart failure, strokes and the build-up of plaque in artery passageways, paving the way for a heart attack. The American Heart Association recommends drinking no more than one drink per day (12 ounces of beer, 4 ounces of wine, or 1.5 ounces of hard alcohol, defined as 80-proof).
- 10 Know that with a healthy diet and exercise, many people with heart disease have led full and active lives.** Ask your doctor about the right exercise regimen for you, as well as suggestions on lowering your cholesterol and blood pressure levels.

To learn more about the variety of resources and programs that SAGE offers, please call us, or visit us online at [sageusa.org](https://www.sageusa.org).

SAGE COMMUNITY SERVICES

SAGE @ The LGBT Community Center
208 West 13th St., Room 207
New York, NY 10011
212-741-2217

SAGE Harlem Center
2090 Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. Blvd.
Suite 201, 2nd Floor
New York, NY 10027
646-660-8953

KEY SOURCES AND ADDITIONAL READING

Heart Disease
Centers for Disease Control
and Prevention
www.cdc.gov/heartdisease

Heart Disease:
Frequently Asked Questions
US Department of Health and Human
Services: Women's Health
[www.womenshealth.gov/faq/
heart-disease.cfm#a](http://www.womenshealth.gov/faq/heart-disease.cfm#a)

Lesbian Health, US Department
of Health and Human Services,
Office on Women's Health
[www.womenshealth.gov/faq/
lesbian-health.pdf](http://www.womenshealth.gov/faq/lesbian-health.pdf)

Heart Disease Data/Statistics
US Department of Health and Human
Services: The Office of Minority Health
[minorityhealth.hhs.gov/templates/
browse.aspx?vl=3&vlID=6](http://minorityhealth.hhs.gov/templates/browse.aspx?vl=3&vlID=6)

Services & Advocacy for GLBT Elders (SAGE) is the world's largest and oldest organization dedicated to improving the lives of LGBT older adults. SAGE's mission is to lead in addressing issues related to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) aging. In partnership with its constituents and allies, SAGE works to achieve a high quality of life for LGBT older adults, supports and advocates for their rights, fosters a greater understanding of aging in all communities, and promotes positive images of LGBT life in later years.

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