

Heterosexual isn't everyone

Studies say that perhaps 1 out of every 10 people considers himself or herself gay or lesbian. Our society doesn't make it easy to share that kind of information. While you may or may not be ready to tell family or friends that you are gay or lesbian, there are important reasons to tell your doctor if you identify yourself this way—or even if you aren't sure.

If they don't ask, why tell?

Telling your doctor about your sexual orientation can be as hard as telling anyone else. While many problems can be taken care of without any knowledge of your sexual orientation, here are a few reasons why speaking up is a good idea. Your doctor

- Can include your partner in discussions, especially if you are in the hospital
- Can stop asking you about birth control
- Can provide safe-sex education that pertains to your behaviors
- Can counsel you about gay-parenting issues, such as adoption and artificial insemination
- Can get rid of myths, such as "Lesbians don't get sexually transmitted diseases"
- Can discuss health-related legal issues that affect same-sex couples
- Can start building an honest, long-term doctor-patient relationship.

How do I tell my doctor?

Supply the information

- On your patient history form. There is usually a section asking whether you are married or single—this is a good place for the information.
- When your doctor is asking general questions about your health and lifestyle—for example, when he or she asks, "Are you married?" Do let the doctor know if you have a partner that you would like to include in conversations.
- When you are asked about sexual activity, safe sex, or birth control.
- If you don't think your doctor has given you a chance to tell, it's OK to say that you have something you need to talk about.

Struggling through this possibly awkward period with your doctor is important because this person can help you maintain good physical and

mental health. Although your sexual orientation is a small part of who you are, the issues you deal with may be very important at times in your life.

What about confidentiality?

While everything about a doctor-patient relationship is confidential, there are some issues that you may not want the doctor to put in the chart. You have the right to ask that information about sexual orientation be left out.

Suppose I am not sure I am gay?

You don't have to be sure before you talk to your doctor. In fact, a trusted doctor can answer any questions you might have. While you may not think of yourself as gay or lesbian, you should let the doctor know if you do have same-sex partners from time to time.

What if my doctor doesn't react well?

If you don't feel comfortable telling your doctor, or if he or she doesn't respond the way you would have liked, think about finding a new doctor. It is important that you be able to speak openly. If your current doctor can't meet your needs, there are many who will.

Useful resources

Gay and Lesbian Medical Association

459 Fulton St
Suite 107
San Francisco, CA 94102
(415) 255-4547
Fax: (415) 255-4784
Web site: www.glma.org

Gay and Lesbian National Hotline

(888) 843-4564

Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG)

1101 14th St, NW
Suite 1030
Washington, DC 20005
(202) 638-4200

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