

LGBT ADULTS & TOBACCO USE

Smoking Prevalence Rates Among LGBT Adults

People in the LGBT community are 1.5-2.5 more likely to smoke cigarettes than cisgender* heterosexuals.



There are lots of reasons why people in the LGBT community are more likely to smoke.

The reality of living in a society that shows rejection of and discrimination toward LGBT people can cause incredible stress. Many smokers report that they smoke to relieve stress and anxiety. This stress can start from a young age. Almost 90% of adult regular smokers starting smoking by age 18 and LGBT youth have higher rates of smoking compared to heterosexual and cisgender youth.

Many people do not know that for many years LGBT communities were targeted by the tobacco industry through advertising and the sponsoring of events—these companies were among the first to sponsor Pride events. Their involvement attempted to normalize smoking in LGBT communities while exposing individuals to excessive tobacco ads. These companies took advantage of members of the LGBT community for financial gain.

LGBT culture often involves strong friendships and socializing in venues including bars and clubs. Prior to indoor smoking bans in such areas, these settings were conducive to smoking while socializing with friends.

*Cisgender describes individuals whose gender identity matches the sex they were assigned at birth.

Health Effects of Smoking

Anyone who smokes is at greater risk for serious health conditions like certain types of cancer, COPD, heart disease, and breathing issues. You may not experience or see the health effects of smoking right away, but that doesn't mean they are not happening. If you are living with a mental health or substance use disorder, smoking can worsen mental health symptoms and increase your risk for relapse. If you are living with HIV, you face unique health risks because smoking can affect how well your HIV medication works and increase your risk for certain conditions.

For men, smoking increases their risk of erectile dysfunction and fertility problems. For women, smoking can affect their reproductive health by causing problems with conceiving and increasing the baby's risk for negative health conditions.

Smoking may also play a role in female sexual dysfunction, which can include lower feelings of sexual desire and arousal.

For LGBT adults, some unique health risks of smoking include:

- Developing blood clots and having a stroke if you are a transgender woman taking estrogen therapy
- Higher risk of developing anal cancer if you are a gay or bisexual man who has the human papilloma virus (HPV)
- Within LGBT communities, heavy drinking and smoking greatly increases your chance of getting cancer of the mouth, throat, and esophagus

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Other Effects of Smoking and the Benefits of Quitting

- Buying cigarettes is expensive. With a pack costing approximately \$5 to \$12, a \$7-pack-a-day habit will cost you \$2,555 a year.
- Secondhand smoke harms those around you—humans and animals. Cats and dogs are twice as likely to get cancer if their owner smokes.
- Smoking affects a person’s looks—it causes wrinkles and sagging skin, yellows the teeth, and stains fingernails and fingers.
- Smoking can cause stress on relationships leading to arguments on topics like quitting, costs, and dangers.
- Just two weeks to three months after quitting, your risk of having a heart attack starts to drop and your lung function improves.
- Quitting smoking can decrease feelings of depression, anxiety, and stress and improve your mood and quality of life.
- If you’re a transgender woman and you quit smoking, you decrease your chance of developing blood clots and having a stroke.

VA Tobacco Cessation Resources



VA Quitline

1-855-QUIT-VET

- 1-855-784-8838
- QUIT Vet is staffed by trained counselors, M–F, 9 am–9 pm ET English & Spanish
- Cessation counseling begins immediately—no judgment, just true support
- QUIT Vet staff understand the counseling needs of LGBT Veterans



VA’s Text Message Program

SmokefreeVET

- You’ll receive encouraging messages and tips about quitting
- Sign up in English—text VET to 47848
- In Spanish—text VETesp to 47848



VA Health Care Provider

Cessation counseling and medication

- Let the VA staff who provide your health care (e.g., primary care, mental health) know you are interested in tobacco cessation counseling and/or medication. Some Veterans find it easier to quit when they can bring a partner or spouse to therapy sessions. Talk to your provider about bringing your partner into appointments if that would be helpful in meeting your goals.



Website

SmokefreeVET

- Visit <https://smokefree.gov/veterans> to find many resources to help you quit
- On SmokefreeVET, you can “Build Your Quit Plan” and print it out