

PrEP: What you need to know

What is PrEP?

PrEP is short for pre-exposure prophylaxis. This is a medicine that helps protect people who are regularly exposed to HIV from getting the virus. People who don't have HIV can take a pill once a day to lower their chance of becoming infected.

How can PrEP protect me from HIV?

The PrEP pill contains two drugs, tenofovir and emtricitabine. These drugs help keep the virus from multiplying. If you're exposed to HIV, these drugs make it less likely that the virus could infect you.

It's important to know that PrEP is not 100% protective. You will need to continue to lower your risk of getting HIV by:

- Using condoms every time you have sex
- Using only clean needles and sterile works if you inject any drugs
- Getting tested every 3 months for HIV, other sexually transmitted infections (STIs), hepatitis B, and hepatitis C

Does PrEP have side effects?

PrEP usually doesn't cause any side effects. But some people might have nausea, stomach discomfort, headache, loss of appetite, or weight loss. Rare side effects include loss of bone density, liver or kidney damage, or changes in fat cells.

How do I know if PrEP is right for me?

You might benefit from taking PrEP if you:

- Have a sexual partner who is HIV-positive
- Don't know the HIV status of your sexual partner(s)
- Have been diagnosed with one or more STIs
- Exchange sex for money, food, or housing
- Use injection or IV drugs, such as heroin, cocaine, or meth

Who shouldn't use PrEP?

You shouldn't use PrEP if you:

- Are HIV-positive
- Don't know your HIV status
- Don't think you can take the medicine once a day every day
- Don't think you can commit to using condoms and clean needles (if you inject drugs), and getting tested regularly for HIV and STIs as part of the plan

How long will I use PrEP?

The amount of time that you use PrEP depends on your own situation. Usually people use PrEP as long as they are at high risk for getting HIV. Some people might use this medicine for a few months, while others use it over several years.

What are some reasons to stop using PrEP?

You might stop using PrEP for one or more of the following reasons:

- You become infected with HIV
- You have trouble with side effects
- You have trouble taking it once every day
- You're no longer at risk for HIV infection
- You want to stop

What are other things I can do to lower my risk of becoming infected with HIV?

- Talk to your sexual partners about their HIV status and how to prevent infection. Use condoms every time you have sex.
- Practice safer sex by using a condom every time you have sex, limiting your sexual partners, and making sure you talk to new sexual partners to find out if they are at risk of being HIV-positive.
- Use clean needles and sterile works if you use injection or IV drugs.