

# User's Guide To PrEP



ONTARIO  
HIV TREATMENT  
NETWORK

PrEP+talk

# About PrEP



PrEP is a once-a-day pill that prevents HIV infection by stopping the virus from spreading in your body.

PrEP only works if you have enough medication in your body, so you need to take it **as prescribed**.

PrEP is a combination of two drugs: tenofovir disoproxil fumarate and emtricitabine (TDF/FTC), or tenofovir alafenamide and emtricitabine (TAF/FTC). You may have heard it called Truvada or Descovy, which are the brand names for TDF/FTC and TAF/FTC respectively. In Canada, we also have generic versions of TDF/FTC, which work just as well and cost much less.



PrEP+talk



# Take PrEP every day

- Take PrEP **as prescribed.**
- PrEP can be taken with or without food, any time of the day.
- PrEP works best if you take it at the same time every day.
  - Some people find it useful to take PrEP at the same time as an existing routine, like right before bed or with lunch.
  - To help you remember, keep your pill bottle where you will see it.
  - Some people find it helpful to use a dosette.
  - Consider setting an alarm or daily reminder on your phone.
  - You can also sign up for a daily text message reminder service **[thesexyouwant.ca/reminder](https://thesexyouwant.ca/reminder).**

**Store your pills at room temperature – not in the refrigerator and not someplace warm or humid.**

PrEP+talk

PrEP

# Missed doses

PrEP is most effective when taken daily. However, you may occasionally forget to take your pill, and that's understandable. If you forget your pill, take it as soon as you remember. For example, if you usually take your PrEP in the morning, but at night realize you forgot to take it that morning, take it right away, and then just take your next morning dose as usual.

If you don't remember until the next day, **don't double your dose to catch up**. Just take one pill and resume your normal schedule.

If you find you are missing a lot of doses, talk to your health care provider or pharmacist about ways to stay on track.

## Keep a pill with you.

Always carry a pill in a pill box or wrapped in tin foil. This way, if you miss your routine, you will still have PrEP. Replace the pill every few months so that you don't use it past its expiration date.

PrEP

# Know the side effects

PrEP+talk

Most people taking PrEP have no side effects. For those who do, the most common ones are nausea, upset stomach, fatigue and headaches. These symptoms often get better or go away within the first month of starting PrEP.

To prevent nausea, take PrEP with a snack or before bed.

- To relieve nausea, try ginger candy or peppermint tea.
- For gas or bloating, try an over-the-counter gas reliever.
- If soft stools bother you, try a fiber supplement.

Speak to your health care provider if side effects continue to bother you.

PrEP







PrEP

Your health care provider will monitor you for other possible PrEP-related side effects. In rare cases, PrEP can cause kidney or bone problems. That's why anyone taking PrEP should see their health care provider every three months to be monitored for any signs of these problems.

PrEP+talk

# See your health care provider every three months

PrEP

At your three-month check-ins, your provider will talk with you about:

- Any side effects that may be bothering you
- Any challenges you are experiencing taking PrEP as prescribed and strategies to address those challenges
- Your sex life and risk for HIV, and whether PrEP is still right for you.

Tell your provider right away if you experience fevers, swollen glands or a rash – these may be signs of an HIV infection.

PrEP+talk

4





## PrEP

Because PrEP can affect your kidney and bones, it's important for you to see your health care provider every three months to be checked for any signs of these problems and renew your PrEP prescription.

These check-ins also provide an opportunity to be tested for other STIs and to talk about your sexual health and any changes in your situation or risks that might affect your need for PrEP.

To get the best possible care, it's important that both you and your provider are comfortable talking about your sexuality and your sexual health.



# 5 Don't stop and start

Your need for PrEP may change over time. Based on your risks, you can choose to cycle on and off PrEP throughout your lifetime. But stopping and starting can be dangerous. **Talk to your health care provider before stopping PrEP.** And remember to take other steps, such as using condoms, to prevent HIV when you stop taking PrEP.

If you stopped PrEP and want to start again, talk to your health care provider and get an HIV test before taking PrEP again.

If you become infected with HIV, PrEP is no longer the medication for you. This is because PrEP can cause the HIV in your body to become resistant to medication, which makes it much harder to treat HIV.

A close-up photograph of two men smiling warmly at each other. The man on the right is in the foreground, smiling broadly with his eyes closed. The man on the left is partially visible in profile, also smiling. The background is softly blurred.

PrEP+alk

PrEP

# PrEP, condoms and sexual health

PrEP helps prevent HIV, even if you do not always use condoms, but PrEP **does not** protect against other STIs or unplanned pregnancy.

Condoms **do** protect against other STIs and pregnancy. Condoms also give you added protection against HIV, even when you are on PrEP. **To stay healthy, use condoms as much as possible, ideally every time you have sex.**



# Five steps to PrEP

PrEP+talk

- 1 Take PrEP once a day as prescribed.
- 2 If you forget, take it as soon as you remember.
- 3 Tell your health care provider if side effects are bothering you.
- 4 Visit your health care provider for refills and check-ups every three months.
- 5 Don't stop, restart or change how you take PrEP without talking to your health care provider.

PrEP

# More questions about PrEP?

Visit [ontarioprep.ca](http://ontarioprep.ca)



PrEP



PrEP+talk

Adapted from the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene's PrEP and PEP Action Kit