Lipo-Smacking Activism

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In a mask with sunken eyes and shrunken cheeks, the HIV-Lipo Warrior faced Montreal AIDS Walkers last September with the lowdown on lipodystrophy, the body-shape changes that plague HIVers. Who was that masked man? Martin Mailloux, 46, who developed lipoatrophy, or facial wasting, two years ago. The 10-year HIVer joined Lipo-Action (lipoactionquebec@yahoo.ca) to demand more lipo research—and, he says, frank talk about "its severe consequences for our health, physical integrity and quality of life."

The year-old group has lobbied politicians but prefers street theater—"a creative, punchy approach," Mailloux says. Self-described HIV Mutant activists leafleted the AIDS Walk, while Dr. Blindpills, Dr. Motus (French for *shut up*) and Dr. Bouché (*blocked ears*) offered comic critique.

"Doctors are afraid to talk about lipo because people might quit their meds," Mailloux says. But nothing breaks the silence like a good performance: After seeing Lipo-Action outside one AIDS confab, Canadian researcher Mark Wainberg, MD, delivered its message to scientists inside.

New-Fill shots restored Mailloux's cheeks in 2003, but he remembers that sinking feeling. "[HIVers with lipo] deal with discrimination, even in the gay community," he says. "But the eyes of participants after a skit—that's the rising of dignity again."

Mailloux's tips for facing off against lipo:

- **Get creative:** Action (plus play) kills depression. Challenge institutional resistance and your own rage and shame—don't wait for someone to do it for you.
- **Take the stage:** Create a circus or theater that represents your group's experiences and communicates your needs.
- **Dress up:** Use cheap board, photocopies, dollar-store pillboxes, balloons for paunch and buffalo hump—and imagination.

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