Keeping It Real About HIV Prevention

Rene Cotto-Lewis wishes PrEP had been around in 2003.

November 14, 2022 By Rene Cotto-Lewis

Every day in 2003, an estimated 14,000 people globally were newly infected with HIV, according to the World Health Organization. I was one of them.

I know that many people say, well, HIV is not what it was in 2003, and today, we have medications that work better. That's true, but if I had the opportunity in 2003 to take a pill that would have reduced the chances of me being positive, I would be all over it.

That pill exists today, and it's called PrEP, which is short for pre-exposure prophylaxis. PrEP effectively reduces HIV risk between 96% and greater than 99% for people who take it every day. [Editor's note: PrEP is also now available as a long-acting injectable.]

We can help people get on PrEP to prevent HIV and to use condoms to prevent other STDs [sexually transmitted diseases]. Taking PrEP to prevent HIV outweighs feeling frustrated, scared, unsure or anxious every time you have a hookup with someone. Hookups are a reality if you're not in a committed, monogamous relationship, and sometimes even then. Tell the truth; keep it real.

PrEP is widely available, and you can get help to get on PrEP regardless of insurance. PrEP is available for everyone and anyone who is sexually active and HIV negative.

Control your destiny, or your destiny will control you.

What person in the HIV community do you most admire?

Phill Wilson, the previous director of the Black AIDS Institute. With grace, passion and commitment, he has empowered a generation of advocates to educate those of us most affected and infected by HIV.

What keeps you up at night?

Not much. I believe in doing my best each day, so when I go to sleep, I don’t worry about myself personally; instead, I focus on how I can express gratitude for the day and impact others.

What is the best advice you ever received?

You have the potential to transform the world, but you have to believe in yourself. My mother told me this right before she passed away.

Read other POZ Stories or share your own at poz.com/stories.

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.
http://beta.docker.poz.com/article/keeping-real