# Get a Nightlife

This HIV prevention expert fights for your right to party.

September 1, 2007 By Wesley Badillo

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I love life. And I refuse to let anything—even HIV—stop me from living it to the fullest. Originally from Puerto Rico, I first came to New York City when I turned 21, back in 1976.  I experienced a whole new life here: the freedom, the nightlife and, most of all, the dancing! It is my main exercise, my therapy, my passion.

My friends and I hit all the great places—the Saint, Studio 54. Then, around 1981, having gone off to study medicine in Mexico, I began hearing that some of my New York friends were sick or dying from AIDS. I also heard that condoms would protect me, so they immediately became a part of my life. But whenever we visited New York, it seemed that we were all full of fear. The Saint and Studio 54 closed, and I couldn't get into the new wave music other clubs were playing. I felt I had no outlet for relieving my worries. But eventually I got used to the new music—how could I ever stop dancing?

In 1988, I began my career in the HIV/AIDS field, realizing I enjoy working in prevention more than treating a patient. Years later, while working in Australia, I myself tested positive. You might think, now that I've moved back to New York, that I've decided not to go out—that staying home will "protect" my health. Instead, I protect my health so that I can go out! Keeping me off the dance floor would depress me and make me sick—and I do not have time for that.

I prepare packets of HIV meds and multi-vitamins and carry the plastic bags in my pockets ready to be taken—a practice I started many years ago, before I was diagnosed, when I'd get multivitamin packs from a bodega on the way home from dancing. I never miss a dose while out having fun.

I will turn 53 this month. And I plan to keep right on partying, traveling and enjoying life. To do that, I must stay healthy and be responsible. Dancing remains one of my greatest incentives.

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