

Talking
to health
professionals
about PrEP

LITTLE BACK POCKET GUIDE TO

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As more and more of us start to use PrEP, we're encountering health professionals who are asking us questions about our PrEP use, or who don't know as much about PrEP as we'd hope.

It's easy to think that the health staff we encounter – including dentists, GPs (family doctors), nurses, health care practitioners, hospital staff, and mental health workers – will know all about PrEP. After all, it's something that many of us feel strongly about.

The reality is that many health professionals don't know as much about PrEP as we might expect or hope. Our health services introduce hundreds of new drugs and technologies every year – and unless a staff member works in a specialist area (such as sexual health) – they won't necessarily have had training and updates about each of these new drugs or technologies.

It's tempting to be frustrated and annoyed if a health professional doesn't know as much as we'd hope about PrEP. We know that some health workers make assumptions about our sexuality or HIV status if we say we're using PrEP. We also know some people have received judgemental responses about their sex lives when we talk about our PrEP use.

Right from the inception of PrEPster we've believed that PrEP users can be the most powerful and important PrEP educators. Helping health professionals know more about PrEP directly from us can be a great way of ensuring the next PrEP user gets a more informed response.

Most health professionals do amazing jobs (even more so during the recent COVID pandemic). Their jobs are often stressful and challenging – and so we urge you to use these education moments respectfully and constructively. We all learn best when we're being supported!

Offer the health professional the information below. You can also share the links on the next page of this document. Feel free to print the document off and pass it on to the health professional.

Information for health professionals about PrEP for HIV prevention

The information that follows has been created by PrEP users, in collaboration with health professionals, to help you to know more about PrEP.

Still got questions, or want to provide feedback? Contact us at: hello@prepster.info

As more and more of us start to use PrEP as an HIV prevention method, we're encountering health professionals who are asking us questions about our PrEP use, or who don't know as much about PrEP as we'd hope.

We asked PrEP users who had chatted to their health providers about the top PrEP information they had shared. They told us:

"When I'm talking to people about PrEP I explain it's a new way of using anti-HIV drugs to prevent HIV. I frame it really positively as an evidence-based, relatively simple and very effective way that people can be really pro-active in protecting themselves against HIV."

"I know that health care providers can have limited bandwidth, because they are often busy, and so I provide headlines. I emphasise that when PrEP's taken properly, it is almost 100% effective. I also say how PrEP has massively reduced HIV infections, in ways we'd previously not imagined."

"I reminded my family doctor that using PrEP is me taking responsibility for taking care of myself. I get more monitoring and screening for STIs than I ever did before."

"Even though my doctor didn't know much about PrEP, I was able to tell them that the evidence for it is really robust."

For more information visit:

www.prepster.info

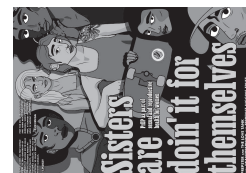
www.prepster.info/resources/

www.nhs.uk/conditions/hiv-and-aids/prevention/

www.tht.org.uk/hiv-and-sexual-health/prep-pre-exposure-prophylaxis

www.bhiva.org/PrEP-guidelines

www.who.int/teams/global-hiv-hepatitis-and-stis-programmes/hiv-prevention/pre-exposure-prophylaxis



PrEP IS DIFFERENT FROM PEP

PEP (post exposure prophylaxis) has been used for almost two decades for people exposed to HIV occupationally and sexually. PrEP (pre-exposure prophylaxis) is different from PEP. It's been available for over 10 years and on the NHS in different parts of the UK since 2017. Most people take oral PrEP, in a tablet formulation, on a daily basis, but there are other ways that some people can take oral PrEP. This includes event-based PrEP: taking PrEP just prior to sex, and then after. Other ways of taking PrEP - including vaginal rings and injectable PrEP - are in development, but not yet widely used.

SOMEONE USING PrEP DOES NOT HAVE HIV

PrEP is used by someone who does not have HIV, to prevent them from becoming infected, if they are exposed to HIV. The drugs used in PrEP are some of the ones that are used for HIV treatment. If someone tells you they are using Truvada (or its generic version) or Descovy (or its generic version) for PrEP, this does not mean they are living with HIV.

PEOPLE USE PrEP FOR DIFFERENT REASONS

Those of us who use PrEP do so for many different reasons. We've made our own risk assessment that informs our decisions to use PrEP. Some of us do so because we have partners who are living with HIV and, although the risk of HIV acquisition might be low (a person with HIV with an undetectable viral load cannot pass HIV on), we want to 'share' our HIV prevention responsibilities. Some of us use PrEP because we are having lots of sex, and sometimes without condoms. Some of us use PrEP because we cannot be certain that our primary partner/s are being monogamous with us. And some of us do so because using PrEP reduces our stress or anxiety about sex and HIV, and/or because it enhances our sexual pleasure and enjoyment. All of these - and others - are valid reasons for using PrEP.

PrEP CAN BE USED BY (ALMOST) EVERYONE: DON'T MAKE ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT A PrEP USER

Using PrEP doesn't necessarily make someone more sexually active (although some PrEP users do have lots of sex, and enjoy doing so). Whilst PrEP uptake has been highest among gay and bisexual men, it's being used - and can be used - by everyone regardless of their sexuality or gender. Using PrEP does not mean a person is gay, or a sex worker, or having lots of sex: although we might be all or some of these!

PrEP USE IS ONE OF SEVERAL WAYS OF LOOKING AFTER OUR SEXUAL HEALTH

Many PrEP users also take other precautions to look after our sexual and reproductive health. PrEP doesn't prevent pregnancy or other STIs, and so other pregnancy-control and STI prevention will be used by many PrEP users.

PrEP USE IS A RESPONSIBLE OPTION - IT DOESN'T MEAN WE DON'T CARE ABOUT OUR HEALTH

Most PrEP users have considered whether PrEP is right for us. For most of us we take PrEP because we want to be in control of our (sexual) health and well-being. Using PrEP is no less responsible than using condoms or using contraception - it means we're taking action to protect our health.

THERE ARE VERY FEW INTERACTIONS BETWEEN PrEP AND OTHER MEDICATIONS

Many health professionals raise concerns about possible interactions between PrEP and other medicines we're taking. There are very few other drugs that interact with PrEP.

There's a useful guide to checking interactions here - <https://www.hiv-druginteractions.org/>

THE REASONS SOMEONE IS USING PrEP MIGHT NOT BE SOMETHING THEY WANT TO DISCUSS

Most PrEP users have taken serious considerations in deciding to use PrEP. The reasons why we're using PrEP might have been taken with a specialist - such as someone in a sexual health service. We might not want to discuss with other health professionals why we've taken that decision: we might be concerned about confidentiality; doing so might disclose information about someone close to us (e.g. the HIV status of one of your other patients); or doing so might put us in danger (e.g. if we think there's a chance that a partner who doesn't know about our PrEP use might find out).

MOST PrEP USERS HAVE REGULAR HIV AND STI TESTS

As part of routine provision of PrEP, most of us who use PrEP are offered regular HIV and STI tests. I probably don't need to be offered further tests just because you now know about my PrEP use.