

SCRIPT: The struggle of taking HIV meds for the rest of your life

VO: Clothing store-owner Yvette Raphael has lived with HIV for almost a quarter of a century.

Yvette Raphael, HIV Activist: *“But sometimes I don't feel like taking my meds because it is just so tiring.”*

VO: The 48-year-old activist and fashion designer didn't think she'd still be taking medication so long after being diagnosed - she thought she would be dead.

Yvette Raphael *“back then the rest of my life looked like five years. And this is 20 years later, because I started treatment.”*

Yvette Raphael: *“I also know a lot of people will be affected if I decide not to take treatment and I die because I got sick. So I would feel guilty about that.”*

VO: For the past 23 years, Yvette has had to take ARVs each day, at the same time. The pills keep her alive, but taking them comes with challenges.

Yvette Raphael: *“It is a struggle. It is getting yourself mentally prepared to take medication for the rest of your life.”*

VO: People with HIV are up to [8 times more likely](#) to have depression than the rest of the population. And when they are depressed, they're less [likely to stick to their ARVs](#).

VO: Yvette says today there's less mental health support for people with HIV than in the early 2000s.

Yvette Raphael: *“Initially, we had support groups the most safest spaces where we could talk about [things like] my husband does not want to use a condom, ...people would say, my boyfriend treats me badly, he goes into the next room after having sex with a condom, and he takes a shower.”*

VO: Yvette sees her shop as a safe space — for herself and others.

Yvette Raphael: *“a lot of advocates come, activists come and chill around this space, come in buy clothes, but that chair that you see there is intentionally made so that you feel comfortable. There's a couch where we can talk about where this fabric comes from, but also how are you, how are you dealing with stuff?”*

VO: She herself might have given up if not for her family.

Yvette Raphael: *“I actually call my husband the treatment police, the ARV police because he does not forget every morning before I open my eyes, my meds are there, he is such a great support”*

VO: Yvette says unemployment and anxiety go hand in hand for people with HIV. Taking lots of sick leave can mean losing your job.

Yvette Raphael: “This illness doesn't care, you can go down to get so sick that you are unable to be employable”

Yvette Raphael: *“There's nothing more frustrating than not being able to provide for your kids not being able to have food so that you can eat and drink medication.”*

VO: Yvette believes helping people with HIV cope with depression is about more than prescribing antidepressants.

Yvette Raphael: *“I don't think pills are the answer. We have to do a little bit more.”*

Yvette Raphael: *“I don't think we think enough about creating spaces for people living with HIV, where they can just talk around the challenges that they are going through.”*