

• • • **Hepatitis C: The Basics** • • •

Alan Franciscus

What is Hepatitis?

Hepatitis just means inflammation of the liver. There are several viruses that cause hepatitis and it can also be caused by other things such as drinking too much alcohol, breathing in dangerous chemicals and fumes, and getting dangerous chemicals on your skin.

Hepatitis C or Hep C is caused by the hepatitis C virus (HCV). It can cause ongoing or chronic infection. Many people with Hep C do not get sick and may not even know they have it. But some people can develop serious health problems especially after being infected for 10, 20, 30 years or longer.

Transmission and Prevention

Hep C is spread or transmitted by blood-to-blood contact. In other words someone's Hep C infected blood would have to get into the bloodstream of someone else.

There are many ways to prevent getting or giving Hep C to someone else including:

- Don't share needles or works (cookers, cotton, ties, water, etc.).
- Sexual transmission is uncommon; safer sex – using latex condoms – can reduce the risk.
- Don't share personal items like razors, nail clippers, toothbrushes, or pierced earrings.
- Make sure only new needles and ink is used when getting a tattoo; a new needle for body piercing. All equipment should be sterilized.
- Cover open sores or wounds.
- A mother can transmit HCV to her baby during pregnancy or birth, but this is uncommon.

What Are the Symptoms?

Many people with hepatitis C have no symptoms. The most common symptom is feeling tired a lot. Other symptoms that people who have Hep C have is feeling sick to their stomach, pain in the area around the stomach, pain in their muscle and joints, feeling down a lot, and a variety of symptoms called 'brain fog.' Some people say it feels like they have a mild case of the flu.

• • • **Healthy Tips:** • • •

- See your health-care provider for regular check-ups.
- Eat a healthy and balanced diet – check out www.mypyramid.gov
- Rest when you are tired.
- Exercise regularly.
- Get the hepatitis A and hepatitis B vaccines if you have not already been infected.
- Avoid or cut down on alcohol.
- Be careful when using over-the-counter drugs such as Tylenol® and ibuprofen.
- Be careful when mixing alcohol, drugs, or herbs.
- Try not to worry too much.

What About Treatment?

Most people with Hep C lead normal lives and may not need treatment. Talk with your doctor or nurse about whether you need treatment. The latest combination of pegylated interferon and ribavirin can get rid of Hep C in about one half or more of people who take it. There is also much research into developing new medicines to treat hepatitis C. New medicines are expected to be available within 2-3 years and they will be taken in combination with pegylated interferon and ribavirin.

The medications approved to treat HCV include:

- **Interferon** is a medicine that you inject under the skin to fight Hep C.
- **Pegylated interferon** is a newer type of interferon that lasts longer in the body and works better.
- **Ribavirin** is a pill that helps fight HCV that is taken with interferon treatment.

It is important that you learn as much as you can about hepatitis C. Lifestyle changes can help to slow down or stop disease progression. Be sure to work closely with your doctor and nurse to make the best choices to stay healthy.

**Visit the HCV Advocate Web Site:
www.hcvadvocate.org**

hepatitis C BASICS

Executive Director
Editor-in-Chief, HCSP Publications
Alan Franciscus

Webmaster
C.D. Mazoff, PhD

Design and Production
Paula Fener

The information in this fact sheet is designed to help you understand and manage HCV and is not intended as medical advice. All persons with HCV should consult a medical practitioner for diagnosis and treatment of HCV.

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