

Testing Positive Now What?

Heather Lusk

Testing positive for antibodies to the hepatitis C virus (anti-HCV) may be scary, but now you have information that can improve your health and well-being. This fact sheet will explore what testing positive means, and what you can do about it. Don't panic – the knowledge you now have will help you make healthier decisions for you and your liver. Information is the key to living well with hepatitis C.

Testing positive for antibodies doesn't necessarily mean you have hep C

When you test positive for anti-HCV, it means that you have been infected with the hepatitis C virus (HCV). What the test doesn't tell you is whether you currently have HCV. About 55–85% of people with anti-HCV still have the virus in their body six months after infection. This means that 15–45% people (about 1 in 4) have antibodies, but not the virus. In these people, their immune system was able to “clear,” or get rid of, HCV. If you test positive

for anti-HCV, you need to get a confirmatory viral load test to see if you still have HCV. This test measures HCV RNA, or genetic material in the blood. If you have “cleared” or “resolved” the virus, this test will come back “undetectable.” If the test comes back “detectable,” then you are living with chronic (long-term) hepatitis C.

If you don't know whether you still have HCV, live like you do

If you know you have antibodies to HCV but have been unable to get the additional confirmation test, you are not alone. The viral load tests are expensive and hard to get without insurance. Since most people who have anti-HCV do have HCV, the best thing to do while you wait for the test is to live like you have hepatitis C, taking good care of yourself and protecting the health of your liver.

“Take good care of your liver and try not to spread hepatitis C to others”

If you have hep C, you have time

Once you are confirmed as having hepatitis C, there will probably be many things running through your mind. Hepatitis C is a slow-moving disease, so most likely you will have a lot of time to make decisions about your health. Take the time to learn about hepatitis C and make the right decisions for yourself. Don't make any snap decisions in the moment. In fact, you shouldn't make any important decisions right away – you may still be in shock. There may be some days when you feel balanced and ready to take steps towards a healthier life, and other days when you don't want to deal with your hepatitis – this is normal. Take the time to think about what is important for

usually lasts 6 to 12 months. Talk to your doctor and people who have tried the treatment to help make your decision. Many people find that complementary therapies such as acupuncture, massage and herbs are helpful in managing their hepatitis C. It is important that you talk with an expert and consult with your doctor since some herbs can be harmful to the liver.

Experimental drugs to treat hepatitis C

There have been many advances in the treatment of HCV since the virus was first identified over a decade ago. However, current treatment options can have many undesired side effects and treatment success cannot be achieved in everyone. There is much research underway to develop new and better HCV

treatment options without the serious side effects of current medications.

Researchers are studying a variety of new drugs to treat hepatitis C, such as medications that directly attack the hepatitis C virus and which will be used in combination with pegylated interferon and ribavirin (called “triple therapy”). It is estimated that these newer drugs will be available in 2011-2012. Talk to your doctor or nurse about whether it is safe for you to wait or if you need to be treated before the newer drugs become available.

Getting support

If you have hepatitis C you are not alone. There are more than four million others in the U.S. with HCV. Some people like to join support groups to learn more about HCV and feel supported by others going through some of the same experiences. Others like to talk with people on the Internet who also have hepatitis C. Talk with people who care about you. Ask them for their support. For more information on support groups in your area, visit www.hcvadvocate.org.

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

Below are just some of the publications and services you can find up at our site:

- HCV Advocate Monthly Newsletter
- Educational materials in English, Chinese, French, German, Hmong, Korean, Russian, Somali, Spanish, Tagalog and Vietnamese
- Medical Writers’ Circle
- Hepatitis Journal Review
- Weekly News Review
- Disability & Benefits Column
- Hepatitis B information
- HIV/HCV Coinfection information
- Hepatitis C Medical Specialists in the US
- Support Group Listings for USA, Canada and Elsewhere
- Links to Clinical Trials
- Links to other Helpful Organizations
- Event Listings
- Fact Sheet series: (English, French and Spanish)
 - Easy C Facts
 - Basics
 - HCSP Fact Sheets

**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.

This information is provided by the Hepatitis C Support Project • a non-profit organization for HCV education, support and advocacy • © 2010 Hepatitis C Support Project • Reprint permission is granted and encouraged with credit to the Hepatitis C Support Project.