

# frequently asked About Hepatitis C



## HIV & Hepatitis C Coinfection

**Q** What does coinfection mean?

### answer

Coinfection means that you have two diseases at the same time. In other words, you have both HIV and hepatitis C (also called Hep C and HCV).

**Q** Is it worse to have HIV and Hep C together?

### answer

Yes, because your body has to fight two infections at the same time it may not be able to fight either one as well as if you only had one. The good news is that most people can take care of both their HIV and Hep C with medications. Unfortunately, Hep C is now the leading cause of death in people with HIV.

**Q** What are the symptoms of Hep C?

### answer

The most common symptom of Hep C is fatigue – feeling tired all the time. Other symptoms include muscle aches, pains, ‘foggy thinking,’ headaches and other symptoms. But the majority of people with Hep C have no symptoms at all. This is because the liver is what we call a ‘non-complaining’ organ – there could be damage taking place and you wouldn’t even know it.

**Q** How does Hep C affect my body?

### answer

Hep C mainly affects the liver. After a period of time the liver may become very damaged and it will not be able to perform many of the functions that keep you healthy.

**Q** What does the liver do?

### answer

First of all the body is responsible for some 500 vital bodily functions that keep us healthy. The liver processes almost everything you breathe (air and smoke), put in your mouth (food) and the medicines you take for controlling your HIV.

**Q** Why is the liver important for someone with HIV?

### answer

Besides keeping you healthy, the liver also has to process the drugs you take for HIV. Some HIV drugs are hard on the liver and they can cause even more damage, so people with HIV and Hep C coinfection should have their liver functions checked on a regular basis.

**Q** Should I be concerned if I have both HIV and Hep C?

### answer

Yes, you should seek medical care for both diseases. The damage caused by Hep C happens faster (more than twice as fast) in someone who has both HIV and hepatitis C than in someone with just hepatitis C alone. The important thing to remember is that both HIV and Hep C can be managed and treated.

**Q** Can I do anything to help my liver?

### answer

Yes, the best thing you can do if you have hepatitis C is to stop drinking or, if you can’t stop, cut down on the amount of alcohol you drink. Other things that can help keep the liver healthy are to eat a healthy diet, drink lots of water and exercise regularly.

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**Q** Does my doctor know about HIV and Hep C coinfection?

### answer

Some doctors know how to take care of both diseases, but some do not. If your doctor does not know how to manage and treat hepatitis C, ask him or her to send you to a specialist who knows about both HIV and hepatitis C. Some people have a doctor for HIV and another doctor for hepatitis C.

**Q** What is the treatment for hepatitis C?

### answer

The medicines to treat hepatitis C are pegylated interferon and ribavirin. Pegylated (or Peg for short) interferon is a medicine that is injected once a week (right under your skin) and ribavirin comes as pills that are taken twice a day. Many people have gotten rid of hepatitis C with these medications. People usually take the medications for about a year, but some studies have found that extending treatment to 72 weeks works better.

### • Hep C FAQ sheet •

### A publication of the Hepatitis C Support Project

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The combination of an HCV protease inhibitor, pegylated interferon and ribavirin is currently approved to treat people with HCV genotype 1 infection, but it has not yet been approved to treat HCV in people coinfecting with HIV and hepatitis C.

There are many new studies of medications to treat hepatitis C in people with HIV. These studies include the newer HCV protease inhibitors, and many other newer types of medications that are being used along with pegylated interferon and ribavirin. The new medications have the potential to dramatically increase the cure rate. For more information visit [www.clinicaltrials.gov](http://www.clinicaltrials.gov) and type in 'HIV/HCV'

**Q** Are there side effects of the hepatitis C medicines?

### answer

Yes, there are side effects to the medications that can include feeling tired, sore all over, and headaches. Some people also feel very down, anxious and depressed. The good news that most people can get through Hep C treatment, and your doctor will be able to help you control some of the side effects. It is also important to have a good support system – family and friends can really help you through treatment. It's tough going at times, but remember you only have to take the Hep C medicines for a limited amount of time.

**Q** How do I get started?

### answer

It is really important that you learn as much as possible and talk to your doctor. Everyone with HIV should be tested for Hep C since you can get HCV in some of the same ways as HIV. If you have Hep C ask about how your liver is functioning and talk about whether treatment is right for you. If your doctor does not know a lot about Hep C, ask him or her to send you to a doctor that specializes in Hep C.