

a series of fact sheets written
by experts in the field of liver
disease

HCV Treatment Side Effect Management: Anal Itching and Other Anorectal Complaints

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One of the newest medications used to treat chronic hepatitis C virus (HCV) infection is Incivek (telaprevir). Incivek is a protease inhibitor, taken with peginterferon and ribavirin, and used for HCV patients with genotype 1. A common side effect of Incivek is anorectal discomfort, including anal itching, burning, and hemorrhoids.

The purpose of this fact sheet is to provide information to help you manage anorectal problems. For this and all health-related problems, talk to your medical provider. There are many causes of anorectal problems that may need to be ruled out before assuming this is a treatment side effect.

“In the controlled clinical trials, 29% of subjects treated with Incivek combination treatment experienced anorectal adverse events, compared to 7% of those treated with peginterferon alfa and ribavirin alone. The majority of these events (e.g., hemorrhoids, anorectal discomfort, anal pruritus, and rectal burning) were mild to moderate in severity;

less than 1% led to treatment discontinuation and all resolved during or after completion of Incivek dosing.” (Source: *Prescribing Information for Incivek*)

Important Information: Physicians are concerned that patients with anal itching may not be absorbing the full dose of Incivek. The theory is that drug is “leaking out” rather than being fully metabolized, and Incivek goes into the gut, which passes through to the other end. Therefore, not only do patients have an itching problem, they are not getting all of their medication.

Tip 1:

- Make sure you are taking all medication as directed. Incivek’s medication guide states, “Take Incivek 3 times a day.
- Each dose should be taken 7 to 9 hours apart.
- Eat a meal or snack that contains about 20 grams of fat, within 30 minutes before you take each dose of Incivek.
- Talk to your healthcare provider about examples of foods that you can eat that contain about 20 grams of fat.
- Always take Incivek with food.”

The 20 grams of fat guideline is a minimum. This is not a modest amount of fat. You may eat more, but be careful, as weight gain and lipid-related problems may occur. Here are suggestions of foods that have approximately 20 grams of fat:

- 2 oz. hard cheese (cheddar, jack, Swiss, etc.)
- 2 oz of full-fat cream cheese
- 4 eggs (with yolks)
- 2.5 Tablespoons peanut butter
- 1.5 Tablespoons of cooking oil (olive is among the healthiest; canola, sunflower, soy and safflower are other healthy oils)
- 6 oz of salmon (serving size varies depending on salmon type)

- 3 oz of canned tuna in oil with tablespoon of mayo
- 4 oz hamburger patty (80% lean/20% fat)
- 2.5 cups whole milk
- 1/3 cup walnuts
- 5-6 ounces of roasted chicken with skin
- To find the fat content of food, enter the name and amount, and scroll down to “total lipid (fat)” www.nal.usda.gov/fnic/foodcomp/search

Tip 2:

- Be sure you are not taking drugs that may interact with HCV medications, which may interfere with absorption. This is true for dietary supplements and over-the-counter medications too. For a list of products that may interact with Incivek go to: www.hcvadvocate.org/hepatitis/factsheets_pdf/INCIVEK%20FDA%20Labeling.pdf

Managing Anal Itching and Burning

These recommendations are from medical providers who are working with Incivek:

- For mild-to-moderate itching, try over-the-counter (OTC) creams or ointments that contain hydrocortisone. Use these sparingly and as directed.
- Apply zinc oxide cream such as Desitin or other protective ointment to the anal region. Calamine lotion may also help.
- There are many products that provide relief for anorectal problems. Preparation H offers a variety; look for one that suits your needs.
- If these measures don't work, your medical provider may prescribe a cream or ointment and/or an antihistamine.

Prevention of anal itching mainly involves washing properly and avoiding irritants. If you already have anal itching, try these self-care measures:

- Keep the anal area clean. Gently cleanse with a soft wet cloth, paper towel, unscented wipe, or squeezable water bottle.

- Be sure area is dry. Pat dry with toilet paper or soft paper towel. A hair dryer at a low setting is a good way to dry the area. Cornstarch, talc or baby powder may keep the area dry.
- Avoid irritants, such as bubble bath, perfumes, scented soaps, etc. Use unbleached, unscented toilet paper.
- Don't apply greasy products such as Vaseline, which keeps the area moist and prone to itching.
- Try not to scratch, as this increases the itch, further irritates the skin and can lead to other problems. Sitz baths and cold compresses may help relieve itching.
- Wear natural fiber underwear and loose clothing. Avoid panty hose and tight-fitting garments.

Managing Hemorrhoids

Hemorrhoids are swollen or inflamed veins in the anorectal region. Hemorrhoids are the result of pressure in the rectum. Straining, diarrhea and constipation may lead to hemorrhoids; so do obesity, pregnancy, sitting on the toilet for long periods of time, and anal intercourse.

Hemorrhoids may cause itching, pain, or bleeding. Serious hemorrhoid problems may need medical treatment, including surgery. Mild hemorrhoids usually respond to self-care measures. All the information mentioned in the previous section, “Managing Anal Itching and Burning” pertains to hemorrhoid management. Additionally, take measures to reduce strain and pressure in the rectum.

- If straining or mild constipation is a problem, try the following:
 - Increase water intake. Aim for six to eight 8-ounce servings a day. For tips on this, see HCSP'S *HCV Treatment Side Effect Management: Water* www.hcvadvocate.org/hepatitis/factsheets_pdf/SEM_water.pdf
 - Boost dietary fiber. Some good fiber sources are wheat bran, prunes, beans, and high-fiber

cereals.

- If water and diet changes don't help, talk to your medical provider about OTC laxatives. Psyllium (Metamucil) and polyethylene glycol 3350 (MiraLax) are gentler than some products.
- If you are straining because of hard stools, try an OTC stool softener.
- Iron supplements may cause constipation and should be avoided by HCV patients unless medically indicated.
- If diarrhea is the cause, be sure to tell your medical provider.
- For tips on this, see HCSP'S *HCV Treatment Side Effect Management: Diarrhea* www.hcvadvocate.org/hepatitis/factsheets_pdf/SEM_Diarrhea.pdf
- If hemorrhoids are painful, take an OTC pain reliever (unless you have been told otherwise), such as acetaminophen (Tylenol), ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin), naprosyn (Aleve) or aspirin.

Don't Forget:

HBV & HCV Advocate Hepatitis Blog

<http://hcvadvocate.blogspot.com/>

Hepatitis & Tattoos

<http://www.hepatitistattoos.org/>

Be Sure to Check Out All of the Other Factsheets in This Series: “HCV Treatment – Side Effect Management”

- A Guide to Hepatitis C: Treatment Side Effect Management
- Managing Side Effects of HCV Treatment
- Side Effect Management: Anxiety, Mania, and Depression
- Side Effect Management: Dental Hygiene
- Side Effect Management: Depression
- Side Effect Management: Depression – For Family and Friends
- Side Effect Management: Diarrhea
- Side Effect Management: Hair Loss
- Side Effect Management: Headaches
- Side Effect Management: Hemolytic Anemia
- Side Effect Management: Injection Site Reactions
- Side Effect Management: Maintaining a Positive Attitude
- Side Effect Management: Mouth Sores
- Side Effect Management: Nausea
- Side Effect Management: Neutropenia
- Side Effect Management: Rashes
- Side Effect Management: Taste Changes
- Side Effect Management: Water
- Side Effect Management: Weight Loss

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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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