

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

HCV Treatment Side Effect Management: Water

Alan Franciscus, Editor-in-Chief

THE IMPORTANCE OF DRINKING ADEQUATE AMOUNTS OF WATER DURING HCV THERAPY

can not be overstated. Many of the side effects from interferon and ribavirin therapy can be helped by drinking water. Can you drink too much water? YES, drinking excessive amounts of water can affect the body's electrolyte balance, which could potentially lead to serious health problems and even death. For this reason it is best to check in with your medical provider about the amount of water you should drink.

There are many strategies that can help you achieve a goal of drinking the right amount of water every day to stay healthy. Try some of these simple tips:

- Drink water before you become thirsty – being thirsty is a sign of dehydration.
- Try to limit drinking too many caffeinated beverages such as sodas, tea and coffee. Drinking caffeinated beverages depletes the body of fluids, which will require drinking even more water.
- Keep water in places that you frequent – at home, in the office and in the car.
- A slice of lemon, lime or cucumber will add some flavor to the water.
- Sipping water throughout the day instead of gulping it will give your body more of a chance to absorb it.

How Much Water?

There are many ways to calculate the minimum amount of water a healthy person needs to drink every day. If you are on HCV therapy you should drink at least the daily requirement and possibly more depending on the recommendations from your health care provider.

One method to calculate the daily amount of water required to stay healthy is to divide body weight by two. For instance, a person who weighs 144 lbs, will need to drink 72 ounces of water a day (nine 8 oz glasses a day).

Additional information on converting measurements is available at <http://www.easysurf.cc/cnver13.htm#fotog1>

How to Keep Track?

There have been numerous studies that have looked at how much water people drink daily. In these studies they have found that people do not drink nearly enough water as they should. In these same studies, most people commented that they thought that they did drink the recommended amounts of water. Clearly, more strategies are needed to educate people about the healthy amounts of water to drink and the tools to help them achieve the daily requirements.

Try some of these simple tips to keep track of the amount of water you drink:

- Fill up a water bottle with fresh water. Write down the amount of water that is held in the bottle and how many times it is refilled throughout the day.
- Buy commercial water bottles that list the fluid content. Fill up or buy enough bottles to meet the daily requirement. Set the bottles in plain view to help remember to drink all of the bottles.

Note: The media has been focused on the use of plastic bottles and the general issue of bottled water. If you filled one third of the plastic bottle with oil, this would be equivalent to how much energy is needed to make the bottle, package the liquid and ship it to retail outlets. This does not even take into account the problem of disposal. From a practical standpoint, we want to encourage people to drink water, but perhaps a good approach is to re-fill and reuse the bottle and always recycle it to prevent the unnecessary waste and pollution of our valuable resources.

Side Effect Management

Many people on HCV therapy report that on days when they drink plenty of water there is a marked decrease in the side effects compared to days when they drink little or no water.

The positive effect of drinking water on side effect management is quite substantial. It is recommended that you drink water right before and right after self-injection and stay well-hydrated throughout the week.

The benefits of drinking water for side effect management include:

- Water flushes out wastes, transports nutrients, and regulates body temperature.
- Water will help keep skin hydrated during therapy, which will help reduce the dry skin syndrome caused by HCV medications.
- Many people on HCV therapy experience the ribavirin cough – water can help lubricate the throat, which results in less coughing.
- Adequate water consumption aids the digestive system, helping to avoid constipation and other digestive problems.
- Drinking water will help replace fluids lost during a bout of diarrhea.
- HCV medications reduce natural saliva production, which can increase the risk of dental cavities and diseases. Water will help keep your gums hydrated and will rinse away harmful bacteria in the mouth.

Drinking adequate amounts of water is one of the best strategies people can use while on therapy to lessen the side effects of interferon-based therapy and stay healthy.



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