

PATIENT EDUCATION/SELF MANAGEMENT

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW: HEPATITIS C VIRUS

WHAT IS HEPATITIS C?

- Hepatitis C is a virus that causes swelling and irritation of the liver.
- The liver helps with digestion and filters waste products out of the blood.
- Hepatitis C can cause serious damage to the liver.
- Hepatitis C has no vaccine, but you can be vaccinated for hepatitis A and B to prevent more damage to your liver.



HOW DO YOU GET HEPATITIS C?

You can get hepatitis C from:

- Dirty needles (tattoos or piercing)
- Snorting drugs with infected equipment
- Sharing needles to inject drugs
- Unprotected sex (rarely)
- A blood transfusion if you got one in the USA before 1992 (All blood now tested for hepatitis C before transfusion)



HOW DO YOU KNOW IF YOU HAVE HEPATITIS C?

- Most people who have hepatitis C look and feel fine.
- You can have hepatitis C for a long time and not know it.
- Usually hepatitis C is found by doing blood tests.
- If hepatitis C damages the liver, it can cause scarring. This is called cirrhosis (sir-oh-sis).
- Your health care provider may order more tests to see how much liver damage you have.
- Some people with hepatitis C can have:
 - Fatigue
 - Stomach pain
 - Joint pain
 - Night sweats
 - Loss of appetite or nausea



WHAT CAN YOU DO TO TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF?

- Get vaccinated for hepatitis A and B. Get yearly vaccinations for pneumonia and the flu.
- Do not drink alcohol or use illegal drugs - these will damage your liver more.
- Do not take a lot of medications like acetaminophen (Tylenol®) and ibuprofen (Motrin®). Talk to your health care provider about all medications, including over-the-counter medications, vitamins, and herbs to be sure they will not damage your liver. Ask your health care provider before you take any pain medicine.
- Do not get tattoos in prison because of the risk of new infection with hepatitis C, hepatitis B, or HIV.
- Do not share your toothbrush, razor, or other personal items.
- Eat a healthy diet and try to lose weight if you are overweight.
- Drink plenty of water.
- Get plenty of rest and regular exercise.
- Quit smoking cigarettes.
- Follow your health care provider's instructions about medications for hepatitis C treatment.
- See your health care provider regularly.



CAN HEPATITIS C BE CURED?

- For many years hepatitis C treatment was difficult and took up to 12 months— the treatment is better now and many patients can be cured of hepatitis C (but if they continue to inject drugs or do other risky things they can get it again).
- Hepatitis C treatment is not an emergency. The liver damage/scar tissue happens over many years, and some people never get much damage or scarring.
- What specific hepatitis C treatment to use, how long the treatment needs to be given, and how soon a person should be treated all depend on many things which are different for each person. You should discuss your case with your health care provider.
- You can get re-infected if you are exposed to the hepatitis C virus again. Successful treatment does not provide protection from repeat infections.