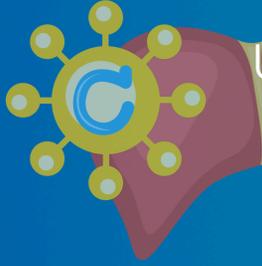


UNDERSTANDING HEPATITIS C



A Patient Guide





UNDERSTANDING HEPATITIS C

A Patient Guide



This booklet will help you learn about hepatitis C. You will find out what causes it, how it affects your body, and the good news: hepatitis C is now curable for most people with today's treatments.

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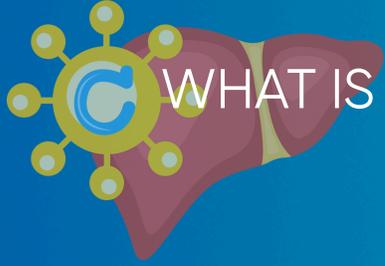


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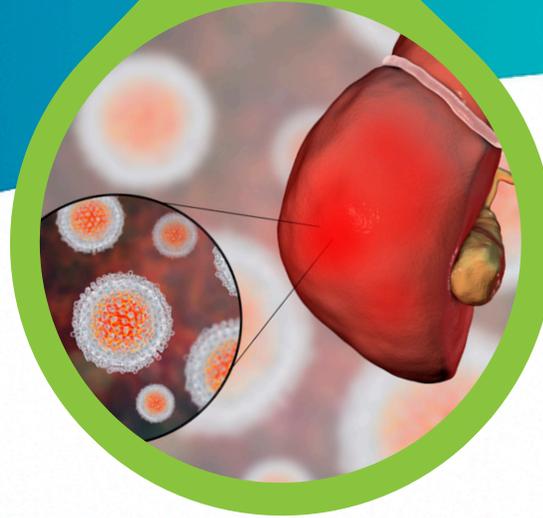


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WHAT IS HEPATITIS C?



Hepatitis C is a viral infection caused by the hepatitis C virus (HCV). It primarily affects the liver and can cause both short-term and long-term illness.

Unlike hepatitis A and B, there is no vaccine for hepatitis C. However, the great news is that hepatitis C can now be cured in most people with a short course of medication.

Think of it this way: Your liver is like a factory that processes everything in your body. Hepatitis C is a virus that infects this factory, slowly damaging it over time. But with treatment, we can eliminate the virus and stop the damage.

Key Terms to Know

Hepatitis: Inflammation of the liver. "Hepa" means liver, and "itis" means inflammation.

Hepatitis C Virus (HCV): The virus that causes hepatitis C infection.

Genotype: The strain or type of hepatitis C virus. There are 6 main genotypes. Most treatments today work for all types.

References:

1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. "Hepatitis C FAQs." CDC.gov. <https://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/hcv/>
2. World Health Organization. "Hepatitis C." WHO.int. <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/hepatitis-c>
3. American Liver Foundation. "Hepatitis C." liverfoundation.org.



HOW HEPATITIS C AFFECTS THE LIVER



When the hepatitis C virus enters your body, it travels to the liver and begins to multiply. Over time, the infection causes inflammation that can damage liver cells.

What Your Liver Does

- Filters toxins from your blood
- Makes proteins that help blood clot
- Produces bile to help digest fats
- Stores vitamins, minerals, and sugar for energy
- Fights infections

Progression of Liver Damage

Without treatment, chronic hepatitis C can progress over 20-30 years:

Inflammation: The liver becomes inflamed as it fights the virus.

Fibrosis: Scar tissue begins to form (mild to moderate scarring).

Cirrhosis: Severe scarring that prevents the liver from working properly. About 20% of people with chronic HCV develop cirrhosis.

Liver Cancer or Liver Failure: In some cases, cirrhosis can lead to liver cancer or complete liver failure.

Good News: Curing hepatitis C stops further liver damage. Even some existing damage can improve after the virus is eliminated.

References:

1. American Liver Foundation. "Progression of Liver Disease." liverfoundation.org.
2. Hepatitis C Trust. "Liver Damage." hepctrust.org.uk.



SIGNS & SYMPTOMS



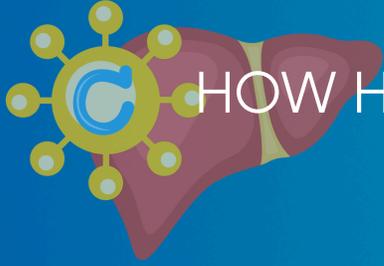
Hepatitis C is often called the "silent epidemic" because most people have no symptoms for years or even decades.

Acute Hepatitis C	<p>(First 6 months after infection - most people have NO symptoms) When symptoms do occur, they may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fatigue• Nausea or vomiting• Loss of appetite• Fever• Dark urine• Clay-colored stool• Stomach pain• Jaundice (rare in acute phase)
Chronic Hepatitis C	<p>Most people feel fine for many years. When symptoms appear, they may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fatigue (most common)• Joint and muscle aches• Depression• Brain fog or difficulty concentrating
Signs of Advanced Liver Disease	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Jaundice (yellowing of skin and eyes)• Swelling in legs or abdomen• Easy bruising or bleeding• Confusion• Spider-like blood vessels on skin

Important: The only way to know if you have hepatitis C is to get tested.

References:

1. CDC. "Hepatitis C - Symptoms." CDC.gov.
2. Mayo Clinic. "Hepatitis C - Symptoms and Causes." MayoClinic.org.



HOW HEPATITIS C SPREADS



Hepatitis C spreads through contact with infected blood. Even tiny amounts of blood can spread the virus.

Most Common Ways HCV Spreads Today

- Sharing needles, syringes, or drug equipment
- Needlestick injuries (healthcare workers)

Less Common Ways

- From mother to baby during childbirth
- Unprotected sex (risk increases with HIV, multiple partners)
- Sharing razors, toothbrushes, or nail clippers
- Unsterile tattoo or piercing equipment

In the Past (Before 1992)

- Blood transfusions and organ transplants (now screened)

HCV Does NOT Spread Through

- Coughing or sneezing
- Hugging or holding hands
- Sharing food, drinks, or utensils
- Breastfeeding (unless nipples are cracked/bleeding)
- Kissing
- Toilet seats

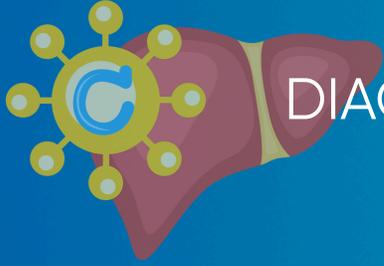
Who Should Be Tested?

The CDC recommends:

- All adults 18 and older (at least once)
- All pregnant women (each pregnancy)
- Anyone who has ever injected drugs
- People born between 1945-1965 (Baby Boomers)
- People with HIV
- Anyone who received blood products before 1992

References:

1. CDC. "Hepatitis C - Transmission." CDC.gov.
2. CDC. "Hepatitis C Testing Recommendations." CDC.gov.



DIAGNOSIS



How is Hepatitis C Diagnosed?

Hepatitis C is diagnosed with blood tests:

Step 1: Antibody Test (Screening)

What It Is: A blood test that looks for antibodies to HCV

What It Means:

- Negative = You have likely never had hepatitis C
- Positive = You have been exposed to HCV at some point (need more testing)

Step 2: HCV RNA Test (Confirmatory)

What It Is: A test that looks for the actual virus in your blood

What It Means:

- Negative = You do NOT have active hepatitis C (you cleared it)
- Positive = You have active hepatitis C infection

Additional Tests Before Treatment

Genotype Test: Identifies which strain of HCV you have (most treatments work for all types)

Viral Load: Measures how much virus is in your blood

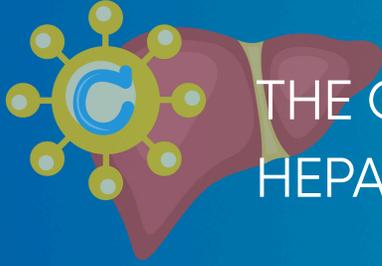
Liver Function Tests: Check how well your liver is working

Liver Fibrosis Assessment: FibroScan, blood tests (FIB-4), or sometimes biopsy to check for scarring

Hepatitis A and B Tests: Check if you need vaccination

References:

1. CDC. "Testing for Hepatitis C." CDC.gov.
2. American Association for the Study of Liver Diseases. "HCV Guidance." hcvguidelines.org.



THE GOOD NEWS: HEPATITIS C IS CURABLE



Hepatitis C is Curable!

Today's hepatitis C treatments can cure more than 95% of people who complete treatment.

What Does "Cured" Mean?

When we say hepatitis C is "cured," we mean:

- The virus is completely eliminated from your body
- You will test negative for HCV RNA
- Your liver can begin to heal
- You will no longer spread the virus to others

The medical term for cure is SVR (Sustained Virologic Response)

How Treatment Has Changed

Old Treatments (Before 2014):

- Interferon injections + ribavirin pills
- 24-48 weeks of treatment
- Many side effects (flu-like symptoms, depression)
- Only 40-50% cure rate

Today's Treatments:

- Simple pills taken once daily
- Usually 8-12 weeks of treatment
- Few side effects
- Over 95% cure rate

Important: Being cured does NOT make you immune. You can get hepatitis C again if exposed. There is no vaccine.

References:

1. American Liver Foundation. "Hepatitis C Treatment." liverfoundation.org.
2. CDC. "Hepatitis C Treatment." CDC.gov.



TREATMENT OPTIONS



Today's hepatitis C treatments are called Direct-Acting Antivirals (DAAs). They attack the virus directly and stop it from multiplying.

Common DAA Medications	
Epclusa (sofosbuvir/velpatasvir)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Works for all genotypes (pan-genotypic)• One pill once daily• Usually 12 weeks
Mavyret (glecaprevir/pibrentasvir)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Works for all genotypes• Three pills once daily• Usually 8 weeks (for most patients)
Harvoni (ledipasvir/sofosbuvir)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• One pill once daily• 8-12 weeks depending on history
Vosevi (sofosbuvir/velpatasvir/voxilaprevir)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Used for people who didn't respond to other treatments• One pill once daily for 12 weeks

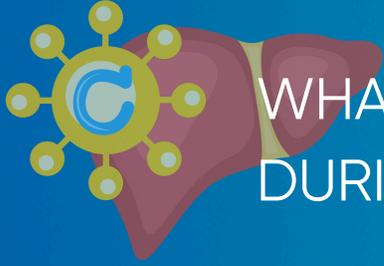
Treatment Length

Most people are treated for 8-12 weeks. Your doctor will determine the right length based on:

- Your HCV genotype
- Whether you have cirrhosis
- Previous treatment history

References:

1. AASLD/IDSA HCV Guidance. "Recommended Treatment." hcvguidelines.org.



WHAT TO EXPECT DURING TREATMENT



Treatment with today's medications is much easier than older treatments.

Daily Routine

- Take your medication at the same time each day
- Some medications should be taken with food
- Set a daily reminder

Possible Side Effects

Most people have few or no side effects. When they occur, they're usually mild:

- Headache
- Fatigue
- Nausea
- Diarrhea
- Trouble sleeping

During Treatment

- Avoid alcohol
- Tell your doctor about ALL medications and supplements
- Don't miss doses - adherence is critical for cure
- Attend all scheduled appointments

Monitoring During Treatment

Your doctor will likely:

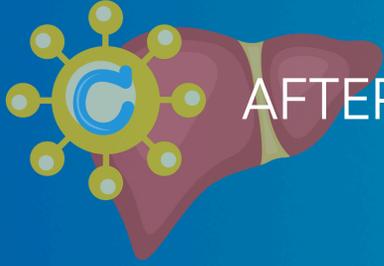
- Check your viral load at week 4 (some patients)
- Monitor liver function
- Ask about side effects

After Treatment Ends

You will have a blood test 12 weeks after finishing treatment. If no virus is detected, you are cured (SVR)!

References:

1. American Liver Foundation. "During HCV Treatment." liverfoundation.org.



AFTER YOU'RE CURED



Congratulations on being cured! Here's what to know going forward:

Your Liver After Cure

- The virus is gone - it will not come back on its own
- Your liver can begin to heal
- Mild scarring may improve over time
- Severe scarring (cirrhosis) may not fully reverse but won't get worse

If You Had Cirrhosis

Even after cure, you will need ongoing monitoring:

- Liver ultrasound every 6 months (liver cancer screening)
- Regular blood tests
- Continue to avoid alcohol

Preventing Reinfection

Being cured does NOT protect you from getting hepatitis C again. To prevent reinfection:

- Never share needles or drug equipment
- Don't share razors, toothbrushes, or nail clippers
- Use condoms if at risk
- Only use licensed tattoo and piercing facilities

Protecting Your Liver Long-Term

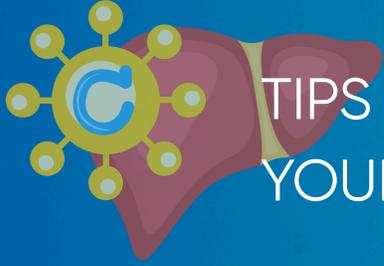
- Limit or avoid alcohol
- Maintain a healthy weight
- Get vaccinated for hepatitis A and B
- Be careful with medications that affect the liver

Antibody Test Will Stay Positive

Your HCV antibody test will always be positive - this shows past exposure. Your HCV RNA test (viral load) will be negative, showing you are cured.

References:

1. CDC. "After Hepatitis C Treatment." CDC.gov.



TIPS FOR TAKING YOUR MEDICATION



DO:

- Take every dose - missing doses can prevent cure
- Take medication at the same time each day
- Take with food if directed
- Set a daily alarm or reminder
- Tell your doctor about ALL other medications
- Complete the full course of treatment
- Keep all follow-up appointments



DON'T:

- Skip doses
- Stop treatment early, even if you feel fine
- Take antacids within 4 hours of some HCV medications
- Take St. John's Wort (interacts with HCV medications)
- Drink alcohol during treatment
- Share your medication with others

Drug Interactions

HCV medications can interact with many drugs. Always tell your doctor about:

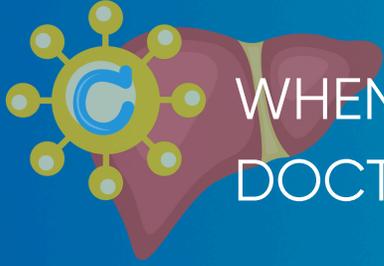
- Prescription medications
- Over-the-counter medications
- Herbal supplements
- Vitamins

If You Miss a Dose

- Take it as soon as you remember (same day)
- If it's almost time for the next dose, skip the missed dose
- Never double up

References:

1. AASLD/IDSA. "Patient Information." hcvguidelines.org.



WHEN TO CALL YOUR DOCTOR



! CALL 911 OR GO TO THE EMERGENCY ROOM IF:

- Vomiting blood or blood in stool
- Severe abdominal pain
- Confusion or difficulty staying awake
- Very swollen abdomen
- Difficulty breathing
- Signs of severe allergic reaction

! CALL YOUR DOCTOR'S OFFICE IF:

- Yellowing of skin or eyes
- Dark urine
- Unusual fatigue that doesn't improve
- Severe or persistent nausea
- Severe headache
- Depression or mood changes
- Rash or itching
- Side effects that bother you
- Missed doses
- Questions about your treatment

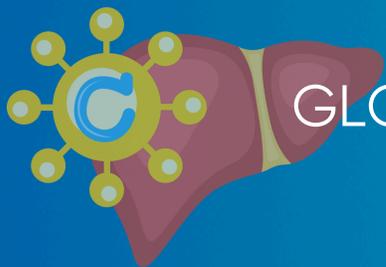


Don't Miss Your SVR Test!

12 weeks after finishing treatment, get your blood test to confirm you are cured.

References:

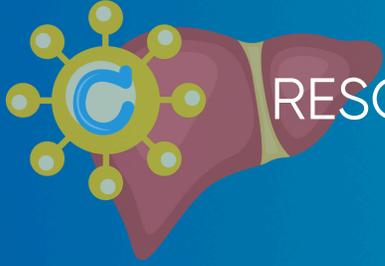
1. American Liver Foundation. "During Treatment." liverfoundation.org.



GLOSSARY



ANTIBODY	Protein made by your immune system in response to infection
CIRRHOSIS	Severe scarring of the liver
DAA	Direct-acting antiviral - the type of medication used to cure hepatitis C
FIBROSIS	Mild to moderate scarring of the liver
GENOTYPE	The strain or type of hepatitis C virus (1-6)
HCV	Hepatitis C virus
HCV RNA	Test that detects the actual virus in blood (viral load)
HEPATITIS	Inflammation of the liver
JAUNDICE	Yellowing of skin and eyes
LIVER FUNCTION TESTS	Blood tests that check liver health (ALT, AST)
SVR	Sustained virologic response - the medical term for cure
VIRAL LOAD	Amount of virus in the blood



RESOURCES



Learn More:

- American Liver Foundation: liverfoundation.org
- Hepatitis C Association: hepcassoc.org
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: cdc.gov/hepatitis
- HCV Advocate: hcvadvocate.org
- AASLD/IDSA HCV Guidelines: hcvguidelines.org
- Mayo Clinic - Hepatitis C: mayoclinic.org
- MedlinePlus - Hepatitis C: medlineplus.gov/hepatitisc.html



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Medical Review: Julia Kravtsova, PharmD, Head Patient Navigator
Content: Paola Larrabure, Pharma Content Manager