Hepatitis C
Living with a Silent, Chronic Disease
Is Hepatitis C Like Other Kinds of Hepatitis?

Hepatitis means inflammation of the liver. Hepatitis can be caused by many things, such as alcohol or certain viruses. Hepatitis C is one virus which can cause hepatitis and can become a lifelong viral infection. In some people with hepatitis C, after many years of inflammation, they can develop liver damage, cirrhosis or liver cancer.

Symptoms of Hepatitis C

Most people with hepatitis C have no symptoms at all and never will. Some people eventually have liver damage which causes the liver to stop working, and then they do have symptoms. These symptoms could include the following:

- Pain in the upper right abdomen
- Fatigue, nausea, low energy
- Jaundice (yellow skin and eyes)
- Itchy skin
- Swelling in the abdomen
Testing Your Liver

It’s likely that hepatitis C was found when routine liver tests were done on your blood or after you donated blood. Once hepatitis C is discovered, a medical evaluation helps assess if you have liver disease.

Treating Hepatitis C

Hepatitis C is treated by taking antiviral medicines. These medicines work very well at curing the virus and have very little side effects.

Most of the time, treatment is 12 weeks long. Sometimes treatment can be 8 weeks long. Sometimes it needs to be longer.

Your healthcare provider will meet with you during your treatment to review how well you are doing on the medicine and review your blood test results.

Blood tests help you:

- Keep track of your health
- Track the viral load
- Find out how you are responding to treatment
Hepatitis C virus is spread through blood. At this time, there are no vaccines to prevent hepatitis C infection or medications to prevent being infected. It’s up to you to keep yourself and others from being infected.

**DO:**
- Cover all skin breaks and open sores
- Get tested for hepatitis C if you don’t know whether you are infected or not
- Use latex gloves if you are in contact with someone else’s blood or body fluids.
- Know your sexual partner. If you have a new partner, use condoms to avoid hepatitis C and other infections which can be passed through sex

**DO NOT:**
- Do not share sharp instruments with others such as toothpicks, razors, manicure equipment, tattoo equipment
- Do not use needles used by others or share needles, do not share straws used in the nose
- Do not share items which could contain blood such as toothbrushes
Hepatitis C is caused by a virus, just as the flu and many colds are caused by viruses. The viruses that cause colds and flu do not cause long-term infections, but the hepatitis C virus can create a long-term infection and can be more serious. If you have hepatitis C, it is important that you get treatment as soon as possible to prevent further damage to your liver.

How HCV Spreads

HCV spreads through exposure to an infected person’s blood. This is most likely to occur if:

- You used an infected needle (IV drug needles, tattoos, acupuncture needles, and body piercing)
- You had a needlestick injury on the job with a used needle
- You shared personal care items such as razors
- You had sex with an HCV-infected person (a less common cause)
- You had a blood transfusion before 1992 (before blood was able to be tested for HCV)

Hepatitis C Develops Slowly

Over time, HCV causes the disease hepatitis C. This disease slowly damages the liver. A healthy liver makes chemicals used throughout the body and removes toxins from the blood. When you have hepatitis C, the liver becomes inflamed and scarred. Chronic liver problems such as cirrhosis and cancer may develop in 10–30 years.