

Hepatitis C

What is hepatitis C?

Hepatitis C, or hep C for short, is a virus that causes problems with your liver. Hepatitis C can spread from person to person, usually through blood. In the United States, most people get hepatitis C by sharing needles or other equipment used to inject drugs.

Some people get better without any treatment within six months. This is called acute hepatitis C. However, many people develop chronic hepatitis C, which is illness lasting longer than six months.

What are the symptoms?

Most people with hepatitis C do not have symptoms. If you have symptoms, they may be flulike and include feeling tired, body aches, fever, chills, loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting, and stomach pain. You might develop liver damage, cirrhosis (scarring of the liver), or liver cancer.

How is it diagnosed?

Your doctor can tell if you have it through blood tests. If the first blood test is positive, you will need more blood tests to make sure.

You should be tested if you:

- Were born between 1945 and 1965
- Have ever injected drugs

- Have human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) infection
- Have abnormal liver tests
- Have been exposed to blood through a needlestick
- Are on hemodialysis
- Received a blood transfusion or organ transplant before 1992
- Have had sex with someone who has hepatitis C

How can I protect myself?

Do not use injectable drugs. Do not share personal items that might have blood on them, like toothbrushes, razors, nail clippers, or glucose monitors. Use condoms when you have sex.

There is no vaccine for hepatitis C, but research is being done to develop one. Patients with hepatitis C should get hepatitis A and B vaccinations because these infections can further harm your liver.

How is it treated?

Hepatitis C can be treated with antiviral medicines. You might have to take shots or pills.

Not everyone with hepatitis C needs treatment. Your family doctor will discuss the best treatment for you or refer you to an expert in the treatment of hepatitis C.



Hepatitis C *(continued)*

Where can I get more information?

Your doctor

AAFP's Patient Education Resource
<http://familydoctor.org/familydoctor/en/diseases-conditions/hepatitis-c/treatment.html>

American Liver Foundation
<http://hepc.liverfoundation.org/>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
<http://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/c/cfaq.htm>

National Institutes of Health
<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/article/000284.htm>

June 2015

Notes:

This handout is provided to you by your family doctor and the American Academy of Family Physicians. Other health-related information is available from the AAFP online at <http://familydoctor.org>.

This information provides a general overview and may not apply to everyone. Talk to your family doctor to find out if this information applies to you and to get more information on this subject. Copyright © 2015 American Academy of Family Physicians. Individuals may photocopy this material for their own personal reference, and physicians may photocopy for use with their own patients. Written permission is required for all other uses, including electronic uses.