

THINGS YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT HEPATITIS C

In the Clinic
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What Is Hepatitis C?

- Hepatitis C is a virus that causes inflammation of the liver.
- It impairs the liver's ability to do its job, which includes helping to digest food, storing energy and nutrients, removing harmful chemicals from the blood, and fighting infection
- Over many years, the infection causes progressive scarring of the liver.
- Hepatitis C is one of five hepatitis infections (labeled A, B, C, D, and E); each affects the body differently.

What Are the Signs and Symptoms of Hepatitis C?

- Dark urine, fatigue, jaundice (yellowing of the skin and eyes), abdominal pain, loss of appetite, and nausea or vomiting may occur.
- Often symptoms are absent until serious liver damage has occurred.
- Cirrhosis (advanced scarring of the liver) and liver cancer may develop.

Who Is at Risk for Hepatitis C Infection?

- Current or former injection-drug users.
- Recipients of blood transfusions before 1992.
- Sexual partners of anyone infected with hepatitis C.
- Health care workers exposed to infected people.
- Dialysis recipients.
- Children of a hepatitis C-infected mother.

How Do You Know If You Have Hepatitis C?

- If you think you could be infected, get tested as soon as possible.



- Your doctor will order blood tests to check for infection.
- If you are diagnosed with hepatitis C, your doctor may order a liver biopsy to determine how much damage the HCV is causing.

How Is It Treated?

- There is no vaccine for hepatitis C.
- The combination of two medicines, interferon and ribavirin, can slow or stop the disease.
- If you don't recover completely, you have chronic hepatitis C, which means your body can't get rid of the virus.
- Avoiding alcohol can slow the progress of the liver disease.
- Being vaccinated against hepatitis A and B viruses may also help.
- In severe cases, liver transplantation may be needed.

For More Information

http://digestive.niddk.nih.gov/ddiseases/pubs/hepc_ez/
http://digestive.niddk.nih.gov/spanish/pubs/hepc_ez/index.aspx
Patient information page titled "What I Need to Know About Hepatitis C" from the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (NIDDK), in English and Spanish.

www.niaid.nih.gov/topics/hepatitis/hepatitisc/Pages/Default.aspx
Information on hepatitis C causes, transmission, and symptoms from the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases.

www.hepatitis.va.gov/patient/questions-to-ask-doctor-index.asp
Questions to ask your doctors about the diagnosis and treatment of hepatitis C from the Department of Veterans Affairs.

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