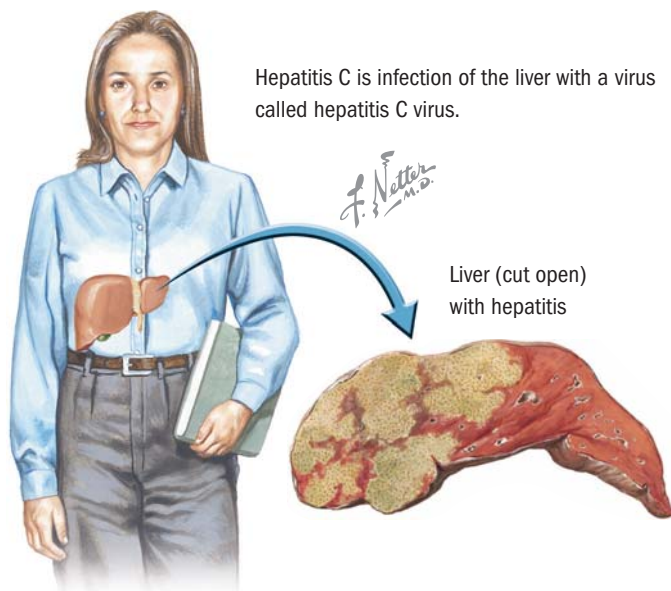


# MANAGING YOUR HEPATITIS C



Hepatitis C is infection of the liver with a virus called hepatitis C virus.



The virus is passed to others by infected blood, as when people share needles to inject drugs. You can also catch hepatitis C from sharp injuries and tattooing.



Symptoms of acute disease include headache, aches and pains, tiredness, and upset stomach. The most common symptom of chronic hepatitis C is fatigue.



Blood tests are used for diagnosis. More than one test will be done to confirm the disease.



## What Is Hepatitis C?

Hepatitis C is infection of the liver with a virus (hepatitis C virus).

Some people with hepatitis C never have serious health problems, but up to 20% get liver cirrhosis. Cirrhosis means liver scarring, so the liver cannot work well. At least 50% of the people infected with hepatitis C virus may have chronic liver disease, meaning liver inflammation (swelling) is long-lasting. About 1% to 5% of infected people die of liver disease.

## What Causes Hepatitis C?

The cause is the hepatitis C virus.

The virus is passed to others by infected blood, as when people share needles to inject drugs. The next most common way is anal sex.

Other ways to get hepatitis C are by pricking a finger on a contaminated needle; tattooing, body piercing, or acupuncture with nonsterile equipment; mother-to-baby infection during birth; and blood transfusions or organ transplants done in the United States before July 1992 or in other countries with poor blood donor screening.

Hugging, kissing, toilet seats, or sharing cups or kitchen utensils cannot transmit hepatitis C.

## What Are the Symptoms of Hepatitis C?

Most people have no symptoms, but symptoms can be mild to severe and sometimes life-threatening. Symptoms of acute disease include headache, aches and pains, fatigue, and upset stomach. These can last for several weeks. The most common symptom of chronic hepatitis C is fatigue. Others are nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, loss of appetite, and pain in the upper abdomen (belly), under the ribs.

## How Is Hepatitis C Diagnosed?

People often find out about having hepatitis C by a routine blood test showing high liver enzyme levels or when donating blood and hepatitis C antibody is found. If your doctor suspects hepatitis C, blood tests will be done to look for the presence of antibodies to the hepatitis C virus. The antibody is a substance made by the immune, or infection-fighting, system in response to an infection.

## MANAGING YOUR HEPATITIS C

Acute hepatitis C has no specific treatment. Most people can receive care at home, including rest and proper diet. People with chronic disease are treated with medicines, but some may cause flu-like symptoms and they don't work for everyone.



Avoid alcohol and substances that hurt the liver.



See your doctor right away if you get jaundice.



Hugging, kissing, toilet seats, and sharing cups or kitchen utensils cannot transmit hepatitis C.

### How Is Hepatitis C Treated?

Acute hepatitis C generally has no specific treatment. Most people can receive care at home. Rest and proper diet are important for severe symptoms. Avoid alcohol and substances that hurt the liver.

People with chronic disease are treated with medicines such as interferon for 24 to 48 weeks, but they don't work for everybody and not everyone wants to take the drugs because of potential side effects. Success depends on which type of hepatitis C virus caused the infection. With genotypes 2 and 3, about 80% of people get well. The cure rates are lower in those with genotypes 1 and 4.

### DOs and DON'Ts in Managing Hepatitis C:

- ✓ **DO** get help for a drug problem if you have one.
- ✓ **DO** follow a healthy lifestyle. Avoid alcohol, which may further damage the liver. If possible, give it up completely.
- ✓ **DO** get regular medical checkups.
- ✓ **DO** see your doctor right away if you get jaundice (yellow skin and dark-colored urine), pain in your abdomen, nausea or vomiting lasting more than 1 to 2 days, or blood in your vomit.
- ✓ **DO** call your doctor if hepatitis C symptoms persist after completion of treatment.
  
- ⊗ **DON'T** take medicines that can hurt the liver, such as acetaminophen.
- ⊗ **DON'T** share needles.
- ⊗ **DON'T** breast-feed your baby.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

#### Contact the following sources:

- Hepatitis Foundation International  
Tel: (800) 891-0707  
**Website:** <http://www.hepfi.org>
- American Gastroenterological Association  
Tel: (301) 654-2055  
**Website:** <http://www.gastro.org>
- National Digestive Diseases Information Clearinghouse  
Tel: (800) 891-5389  
**Website:** <http://www.niddk.nih.gov/health/digest/nddic.htm>

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