

frequently asked About Hepatitis C



HIV & Hepatitis C Coinfection

Q What does coinfection mean?

answer

Coinfection means that you have two diseases at the same time. In other words, you have both HIV and hepatitis C (also called Hep C and HCV).

Q Is it worse to have HIV and Hep C together?

answer

Yes, because your body has to fight two infections at the same time it may not be able to fight either one as well as if you only had one. The good news is that most people can take care of both their HIV and Hep C with medications. Unfortunately, Hep C is now the leading cause of death in people with HIV.

Q What are the symptoms of Hep C?

answer

The most common symptom of Hep C is fatigue – feeling tired all the time. Other symptoms include muscle aches, pains, ‘foggy thinking,’ headaches and other symptoms. But the majority of people with Hep C have no symptoms at all. This is because the liver is what we call a ‘non-complaining’ organ – there could be damage taking place and you wouldn’t even know it.

Q How does Hep C affect my body?

answer

Hep C mainly affects the liver. After a period of time the liver may become very damaged and it will not be able to perform many of the functions that keep you healthy.

Q What does the liver do?

answer

First of all the liver is responsible for some 500 vital bodily functions that keep us healthy. The liver processes almost everything you breathe (air and smoke), put in your mouth (food) and the medicines you take for controlling your HIV.

Q Why is the liver important for someone with HIV?

answer

Besides keeping you healthy, the liver also has to process the drugs you take for HIV. Some HIV drugs are hard on the liver and they can cause even more damage, so people with HIV and Hep C coinfection should have their liver functions checked on a regular basis.

Q Should I be concerned if I have both HIV and Hep C?

answer

Yes, you should seek medical care for both diseases. The damage caused by Hep C happens faster in someone who has both HIV and hepatitis C than in someone with just hepatitis C alone. The important thing to remember is that HIV can be managed and Hep C can be cured.

Q Can I do anything to help my liver?

answer

Yes, the best thing you can do is to stop drinking or, if you can’t stop, cut down on the amount of alcohol you drink. Other things that can help keep the liver healthy are to eat a healthy diet, drink a healthy amount of water and exercise regularly.

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Q Does my doctor know about HIV and Hep C coinfection?

answer

Some doctors know how to take care of both diseases, but some do not. If your doctor does not know how to manage and treat hepatitis C, ask him or her to send you to a specialist who knows about both HIV and hepatitis C. Some people have a doctor for HIV and another doctor for hepatitis C.

Q What is the treatment for hepatitis C?

answer

There have been many advances in the treatment of hepatitis C—we now have treatments that can cure up to 90 to 100% of people. There are many types of medicines to treat hepatitis—pegylated interferon (long acting interferon), HCV inhibitors (pills) and ribavirin (pills). Different combinations of the HCV medications are used to treat different strains of HCV called genotypes.

• Hep C FAQ sheet •

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The information in this fact sheet is designed to help you understand and manage HCV and is not intended as medical advice. All persons with HCV should consult a medical practitioner for diagnosis and treatment of HCV.

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There may be drug-drug interactions between HIV and HCV medications. Some herbal supplements may also cause drug-drug interactions. Be sure to tell your doctor and nurse about all medications—prescribed, over-the-counter, supplements and herbal preparations—that you are taking. The newer therapies that include an HCV inhibitor work just as well in people coinfecting with HCV as in those who have HCV alone.

There are many new studies of medications to treat hepatitis C. The HCV Advocate Website is regularly updated with the latest information so visit www.hcvadvocate.org on a regular basis. To find a clinical trial go to www.clinicaltrials.gov and type in “HIV/HCV.”

Q Are there side effects of the hepatitis C medicines?

answer

Yes, there can be many side effects of HCV treatment depending on the HCV medications you take. Pegylated interferon and to some degree ribavirin have the most side effects including depression (feeling down all the time), anxiety, feeling tired, and body aches to name a few. The most important piece of information about side effects is to talk with your doctor or nurse as soon as you can so the effects can be treated before they become worse.

Q How do I get started?

answer

It is really important that you learn as much as possible and talk to your doctor. Everyone with HIV should be tested for Hep C since you can get HCV in some of the same ways as HIV. If you have Hep C ask about how your liver is functioning and talk about whether treatment is right for you. If your doctor does not know a lot about Hep C, ask him or her to send you to a doctor that specializes in Hep C.



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