



## *Adherence to HCV Therapy*

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### *Foreword*

Adherence to HCV therapy is one of the most important predictors of successful HCV treatment. While there are well-defined and established guidelines for some disease states such as HIV, hypertension and others, it is less clear when it comes to adherence for HCV therapy. The basic take-home message is that people on HCV therapy should strive to take as close to 100% of the medications, 100% of the time or as close to 100% as possible.

Questions about adherence are important because the use of HCV inhibitors can lead to drug resistance that could potentially make therapy ineffective against HCV.

This fact sheet will discuss the importance of adherence and well-known strategies for helping people achieve a successful treatment outcome. It is also important to remember that not everyone will have a successful treatment outcome even with 100% adherence to HCV therapy; however, taking as much of the medicines prescribed will greatly improve the chances of successful treatment and reduce the chances of developing drug resistance.

### **Belief in Treatment**

One of the most important predictors of successful treatment outcome is belief in the medications being used to treat hepatitis C. If a person believes that they will have a successful treatment outcome they will be more likely to take the important steps needed for successful treatment.

### **Building a Relationship with Medical Providers**

Another important strategy is to build a strong and open-minded relationship with your medical provider; one which is non-judgmental

### **HCSP FACT 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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and non-threatening and which provides appropriate education. Medical providers should also encourage the use of support systems, and regularly evaluate psychosocial status as well as have a proactive approach to the management of treatment-related side effects. It is important that people develop a relationship with the entire medical team – not just with the doctor. In these times of managed health care, medical support staff may actually be managing your care more closely than your physician.

### **Customize Treatment Regime**

It is important to customize the treatment regimen to meet the patient's lifestyle so as to make treatment part of, not all of, their lives. When feasible, people should be encouraged to continue working while they are on therapy, as work can help distract from the side effects and may increase their chances of staying on therapy. A good strategy is to include pill organizers that can help keep track of when to take the ribavirin, an HCV inhibitor and any other medications.

### **Medical Providers' Experience**

Another key component of adherence is managing the side effects of treatment before they become so severe that it would require a dose reduction or discontinuance of HCV medicines. There are several factors that will increase the likelihood of successfully managing treatment side effects, including the experience of the treating medical provider in managing side effects as well as the patient self-reporting the side effects in a timely manner. The HCV Advocate Website has many side effect management fact sheets that

provide a wealth of information about common strategies to help with side effect management. However, it is very important that the side effects are always reported to and managed by a medical provider – the final decision on how to treat side effects should always be made by working closely with the medical team.

### **Pharmaceutical Help**

Pharmaceutical companies are another valuable resource. The pharmaceutical companies that produce the medications to treat HCV have website and toll-free phone assistance. The pharmaceutical websites can provide you with many tools, such as email reminders to take the medications or keep medical appointments, and personalized on-line journals to help track side effects and lab work. The pharmaceutical companies usually have an on-call nurse who can help answer questions, provide phone support and even help with insurance reimbursement issues.

### **Keeping Appointments**

It is very important that the person being treated keeps medical appointments and that blood work is routinely performed so that the medical provider can monitor for any potential problems.

### **Social Support**

Staying on treatment sometimes involves pulling together all the resources that are available. This includes as much support as possible from family, friends and employers. It is highly recommended that a support system be put in place well before the start of therapy. One critical area of successful treatment adherence and outcome is attending a support

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group. Support groups are a valuable resource for helping with emotional issues that may come up while on therapy. There will be some members of the support group who have been on therapy and they can help with strategies for maintaining your health and managing side effects while on treatment.

#### **Simple Tips:**

- Make sure that you are mentally, physically and emotionally prepared to take on treatment so that you can give it all the attention and effort needed.
- Talk to your medical provider before starting treatment and discuss any potential side effects and strategies for managing any side effects that may occur while on therapy.
- Try to plan ahead for any problems that may come up when on treatment that would prevent you from taking all of the medicines. For example, if you plan to travel while on therapy, make sure that you keep a copy of the prescriptions with you.
- If needed, use a pill box to keep track of and to remember the medications – try a seven day pill box available at most drug stores.
- Keep a side-effect diary that you can take with you for medical appointments. Report persistent or bothersome side effects as soon as possible. Most of the side effects from treatment can be managed effectively if treated before they become severe.
- Don't forget to enlist the help of family and friends – you don't have to do this alone.
- Drink plenty of water or clear liquids without caffeine. If you don't like the taste

of water, try adding a little bit of lemon or orange.

- Eat a healthy, balanced diet and try to maintain a healthy weight. Think of food as medicine.
- Try light to moderate exercise everyday if possible.

#### **The Most Valuable Tool**

People with hepatitis C have the most valuable tool available – themselves – to help make treatment outcomes successful by being proactive in the management and treatment of HCV. This can be accomplished by using all the resources available to them, including family, peers, nurses, physicians' assistants, nurse practitioners, case managers, pharmacists, psychologists and patient support programs.

#### **Final Thoughts**

The strategies discussed above can help give people a better chance for a successful treatment outcome. However, there are many other factors that influence treatment outcome such as the type of treatment and HCV genotype. It is important to remember that not everyone can achieve treatment success no matter how adherent they are to treatment. Although we should all strive for 100% adherence to HCV treatment medications, no one is perfect and there will be times when a person will forget to take a pill. There is nothing to be gained by playing the "blame game" because someone is not 100% adherent – we are only human and perfection is an ideal not a reality. Remember to give it all you have; but try to be gentle with yourself especially while on treatment.

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*Resources:*

**AbbVie**

- **Access Solutions**  
<https://www.viekira.com/proceed-program>  
 Phone: 1-844-2proCeed

**Gilead**

- [www.mysupportpath.com/](http://www.mysupportpath.com/)  
 Phone: 1-855-769-7284

**Janssen**

- <http://www.jjpaf.org>  
 Phone: 1-800-652-6227

**Kadmon Pharmaceuticals**

- Kadmon Assistance:  
 Phone: 1-888-668-3393

**Hepatitis C Support Project – National Support Group Listing**

[www.hcvadvocate.org/community/groups.asp](http://www.hcvadvocate.org/community/groups.asp)

***Related publications:***

- **Harvoni Package Insert**  
[http://www.hcvadvocate.org/hepatitis/factsheets\\_pdf/harvoni\\_pi.pdf](http://www.hcvadvocate.org/hepatitis/factsheets_pdf/harvoni_pi.pdf)
- **VIEKIRA PAK Package Insert**  
[http://www.hcvadvocate.org/hepatitis/factsheets\\_pdf/viekirapak\\_pi.pdf](http://www.hcvadvocate.org/hepatitis/factsheets_pdf/viekirapak_pi.pdf)
- **Patient Assistance Programs**  
[www.hcvadvocate.org/hepatitis/factsheets\\_pdf/Patient\\_Assistance.pdf](http://www.hcvadvocate.org/hepatitis/factsheets_pdf/Patient_Assistance.pdf)

***For more information***

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>American Association for the Study of Liver Diseases</b><br/> <a href="http://www.aasld.org">www.aasld.org</a></li> <li>• <b>Centers for Disease Control and Prevention</b><br/> <a href="http://www.cdc.gov">www.cdc.gov</a></li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Food and Drug Administration (FDA):</b><br/> <a href="http://www.fda.gov">www.fda.gov</a></li> <li>• <b>Mayo Clinic</b><br/> <a href="http://www.mayoclinic.com">www.mayoclinic.com</a></li> </ul> |
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*Visit our websites to learn more about viral hepatitis:*

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[www.hepatitistattoos.org](http://www.hepatitistattoos.org)

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