



HEPATITIS C LESSONS • PART 6

Living With Hepatitis C

PURPOSE

To teach people in your group what they can do to care for and protect their livers.

FACTS

A good conversation to have with your group is how to take an active role in caring for the liver, such as:

- *Choosing healthy foods and drinks*
- *Keeping the air where you live and work free from chemicals*
- *Reaching and keeping a healthy weight*
- *Making time for the rest you need*
- *Being careful about taking medicines*
- *Trying to keep stress down*
- *Drinking a healthy amount of water every day*

DISCUSSION TOPICS

What kind of medical care will you need?

What do you need to learn about hepatitis C?

What do you need to do about your overall health?

Why should you reach out to people for support?

Handout: How do you stay healthy with hepatitis C and also protect your liver?

Here are some sample questions and answers you can use as you like during your meeting

What kind of medical care will you need?

Hepatitis C is a serious disease. As someone with the virus, you need to see your healthcare provider regularly for checkups. Once you schedule an appointment, be sure not to miss it.

During your appointment, you may want to discuss the following topics with your healthcare provider and your healthcare team:

- *Symptoms you have had since your last visit*

- *Hepatitis C treatment*
- *How you can live a more healthy life*
- *If you need to be vaccinated for hepatitis A and/or hepatitis B*
- *Answers to a prepared list of questions. Ask for places to get more information*
- *Your commitment to getting better*
- *Any over-the-counter medicines, vitamins, or supplements you are taking*

Remember:

The most important person in your healthcare team is you!

NOTES

What do you need to learn about hepatitis C?

Knowing more about hepatitis C can help you make healthy choices. You can find out about the virus by:

- *Talking to people who know what you are going through, including your healthcare provider and your support group*
- *Contacting your Veterans Affairs health office if you are a veteran. Ask them for information on hepatitis C, or visit www.hepatitis.va.gov*
- *Checking out government educational groups or nonprofit groups that deal with hepatitis C (these websites typically end in .gov, .org, or .edu)*
- *Seeing if your healthcare provider's office has a book or pamphlet about hepatitis C*
- *Talking to healthcare workers who may suggest reading materials*

NOTES

Living healthily with hepatitis C and protecting your liver may require some changes.

Healthy Tips:

- *Hard liquor, beer, and wine can hurt your liver. The best thing you can do is stop drinking alcohol, but if you can't stop, cut down and try to get some help to quit*
- *Avoid raw or undercooked shellfish (this includes oysters, clams, lobster, shrimp, and mussels). Raw shellfish sometimes contains a virus that causes a different kind of hepatitis (hepatitis A), and a bug called vibrio vulnificus, which can be dangerous for people with hepatitis C. Talk to your healthcare provider about getting vaccinated for hepatitis A and B before starting treatment for hepatitis C*
- *Try not to have too much sugar, salt, or fatty foods. They can make you gain weight*
- *Cut down on junk food (cookies and chips), fast food (pizza and cheeseburgers), and deep-fried food*
- *Try not to have too much food that's made with white flour or white sugar. Try to eat multigrain food that has vitamins and fiber your body needs*
- *Stay away from food that's overcooked or over-processed. It doesn't have the nutritious parts your body needs*
- *Avoid large-dose or mega-potency multivitamins, including those with iron. They can overwork your liver*
- *Caffeine is also a chemical that your liver has to process. You may want to go easy on all caffeinated drinks*
- *Although newer studies say that drinking small amounts of coffee may slow liver disease, you should check with your healthcare provider to see what is right for you. They can overwork your liver*

NOTES

Do you need to change your surroundings?

It's important to avoid substances that might harm your liver:

- *Smoking damages your liver. If you smoke, you should stop. Smoking also makes your liver work harder to remove toxins (poisons) from your body. If you stop smoking, your liver can go back to working as if you weren't smoking*
- *Handle chemicals carefully, whether you are home or at work. Everything you breathe or absorb through your skin can affect your liver:*
 - If you have to use chemicals, protect yourself
 - Make sure your work area has plenty of fresh air
 - Cover your skin. Wear long sleeves, long pants, gloves, and a protective face mask
 - If you work around strong chemicals, you may also need to wear protective breathing equipment
- *Fumes from paint thinners, cleaning supplies, pesticides, and aerosol sprays can also damage your liver. Avoid them if you possibly can*

NOTES

What can you do to reach and keep your body at a healthy weight?

- *Exercise can help keep you physically and emotionally healthy. Regular exercise is best, such as walking, stretching, yoga, or aerobics. Talk to your healthcare provider before you start any exercise routine*
- *Having and keeping a healthy weight can also help keep your liver healthy*
- *Write down what you eat. It will help you keep track and lose weight*
- *Check out weight control programs*

Why reach out to people?

Don't forget you can confide in people you trust—family, friends, coworkers, and people you meet through a support group. Talking with people can be good for your health.

NOTES

Are you getting the rest you need?

- Rest when you are tired. Try to take a short nap during the day. Or find a time when you can just relax
- Get enough sleep. Most people need 7 to 9 hours of sleep every night
- Try to do things to help cut down on stress, such as meditation or yoga. Prayer may also help you reduce stress

What medicines do you need to be careful about taking?

- Do not use tobacco and street or illegal drugs
- Drugs like acetaminophen (Tylenol®) can be harmful if you take too much. Large doses sometimes cause liver failure
- Always check with your healthcare provider before taking any drugs—prescription medicine, over-the-counter drugs, or supplements

NOTES

Review Points

What can you do to reach and keep your body at a healthy weight?

- *Eat a healthy, balanced diet with lots of vegetables (especially green vegetables) and fruits*
- *Eat food that has fiber. Fruits, vegetables, and grains all have a lot of fiber*
- *Have different types of protein. You probably know about animal proteins found in meat, poultry, fish, milk, cheese, and eggs. But there are also vegetable proteins, found in beans, nuts, seeds, tofu, and soy products*
- *Drink lots of water. Water helps to remove toxins (poisons) and process important nutrients*

Do you know about this food resource guide

MyPlate, from the US Department of Agriculture, can help you choose the right food and the right amount of food. You'll find it online at www.choosemyplate.gov.

Suggested Reading:

A Guide to Healthy Living with Hepatitis C

www.hcvadvocate.org/hepatitis/factsheets_pdf/Healthy_Living_Guide.pdf