



# HEPATITIS C LESSONS • PART 7

## *Preparing for Better Discussions With Your Healthcare Provider and Understanding the Patient's Bill of Rights*

### **PURPOSE**

To get the members of your group ready for their healthcare provider appointments. By planning ahead before a visit, people can get more of what they want from conversations with their healthcare providers.

### **Tips for having a successful appointment with your healthcare provider**

Appointments with a healthcare provider can be pretty stressful. It's a good idea to go over with your group different ways to prepare for your visits.

- *Write out questions to avoid having to remember them at the appointment*
- *Know how long the appointment is. This helps to keep the purpose of your appointment in focus*
- *Share important health information*
- *It is a good idea to become an active partner in your treatment.*
- *Asking for clarification shows the healthcare provider that you care about your health*
- *Taking notes tells the healthcare provider you can follow through with treatment*
- *Bring someone with you to help you write notes and remember what was discussed*

### **DISCUSSION TOPICS**

What kind of healthcare provider should you see?

How do you get ready for your healthcare provider visit?

What information should you share with your healthcare provider?

Why partner with the healthcare provider?

How do you make sure you are working as a team?

How do you make a good impression at your appointment?

What should you expect from the appointment itself?

Do you know what the Patient's Bill of Rights is?

How is health information protected?

What rights does the Privacy Rule give for health information?

**Handout:** Suggested questions to ask your healthcare provider;  
Understanding the Patient's Bill of Rights

## *What kind of healthcare provider should you see?*

If someone is diagnosed with hepatitis C, the healthcare provider might recommend seeing one of these specialists:

- *A gastroenterologist is an expert on the digestive system, which includes the stomach, intestines, and liver*
- *A hepatologist is a gastroenterologist who's an expert in treating people with liver diseases, such as hepatitis C*
- *An infectious diseases doctor is a medical doctor who specializes in specific diseases. You would want to work with one who specifically treats hepatitis C*

## *Ready for your visit to the healthcare provider?*

With a little planning, you can have a productive appointment.

Things to do before the visit:

- *Ask the healthcare provider's office to mail or email any paperwork they will need for the appointment. Fill it out ahead of time*
- *Write down questions and list them in the order of their importance.*
- *When making the appointment, ask if there is anything needed beforehand*

## **NOTES**

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# What information should you share with the healthcare provider?

You have to give your healthcare provider information about yourself. It is the only way your healthcare provider can give you the treatment that is right for you.

Some things healthcare providers will need to know from people with hepatitis C:

- *Most healthcare provider offices will ask for a medical history, including a list of:*
  - *Illnesses*
  - *Surgeries*
  - *Symptoms*
  - *Life changes*
  - *Important stressors in your life*
- *Also write down:*
  - *If you work with or around harmful substances*
  - *How much alcohol you drink*
  - *Any and all drug use in the past 10 years*
- *Be sure to list all the prescription and over-the-counter medicines, vitamins, herbs, and food supplements that you are taking. Include the dose, amount, and how often you take each one*

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## What makes a good impression at the appointment?

Making a good impression on the healthcare provider is more important than most people realize. Show commitment to staying with treatment. Here's how:

- *Arrive on time for the appointment*
- *Be alert and pay attention*
- *Dress as if you are going to an important meeting*
- *Take notes. A notebook with pockets is a good way to keep all the medical information in one place*
- *Bring a friend or family member to take notes and for emotional support.*

## What should you do at the appointment with the healthcare provider?

- *Ask the questions that you wrote down before your appointment. Talk about your most important health issues first. Try to be brief, but clear. You can bring up the less important issues if there's time later*
- *Listen carefully to what the healthcare provider says. If the healthcare provider's instructions are unclear, ask to have them explained*
- *Take notes. If the healthcare provider makes suggestions, write them down. Ask the healthcare provider to spell any difficult words*
- *Speak up if the healthcare provider's instructions about the treatment are not clear. Ask to have things explained in more detail*

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## Why partner with the healthcare provider? How do you make sure you are working as a team?

Healthcare providers want to help. When people with hepatitis C work with their healthcare providers towards the same goal, they can help each other achieve that goal.

What the healthcare provider says is just as important as what you say to the healthcare provider. Working with the healthcare provider gives you a greater chance of being satisfied with the healthcare you receive.

Here are some tips for being a good partner with the healthcare provider:

- *Tell the healthcare provider that you want to work together in your treatment. Make eye contact when talking to the healthcare provider*
- *Understand that as you talk, the healthcare provider will be planning the best chance for treatment success*

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## Do you know what the Patient’s Bill of Rights is

Everyone who receives medical care has certain rights. They are all listed in “A Patient’s Bill of Rights,” written by the American Hospital Association. Even though it is not a law, it has been widely accepted by the healthcare industry.

During your treatment for hepatitis C, there will be times when you should remember that the Patient’s Bill of Rights might help you out. You should ask to find out if your healthcare provider follows the Patient’s Bill of Rights. If your healthcare provider does, it could help you in a number of ways:

- 1. You have the right to receive medical care that takes your wishes, needs, and feelings into consideration.*
- 2. You have the right to get all the information about your diagnosis from your healthcare provider.*
- 3. You have the right to what’s called informed consent. This means that the healthcare provider must give you enough information about a treatment or procedure so that you can decide whether or not to have it.*
- 4. You have the right to refuse treatment (if allowed by law).*
- 5. You have the right to privacy concerning your own medical care.*
- 6. You have the right to expect that all information and records about your care will be private.*

Other patient rights have to do with staying in a hospital. If you are hospitalized, ask to see the Patient’s Bill of Rights for that hospital.

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## How is health information protected?

A federal law called the Privacy Rule (a part of HIPAA, Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act) protects information about your health. It limits who is allowed to look at your health records.

The Privacy Rule applies to all forms of information about your health, whether it's written, electronic (on a computer or database), or spoken.

Another federal law, called the Security Rule, is just for your electronic health records. The Security Rule requires organizations to guarantee that your records will be protected, and that they are secure enough so that no one can gain access to them.

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## What rights does the Privacy Rule give for health information

The federal government requires health insurers and providers to uphold your right to:

- *Get a copy of your health records*
- *Get in writing how information about your health may be used and shared*
- *Decide if you want to allow your health information to be used or shared for certain purposes, such as for advertising*
- *Get a report on when and why your health information was shared for certain purposes*
- *Check with your local health department, because some states have additional rights and protections*

If you believe that your rights are being denied, or that your health records aren't being protected, you can file a complaint with your health insurance provider. You can also file a complaint with the US government.

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## Asking your healthcare provider questions

Part of your appointment should include asking your healthcare provider questions.

- *By writing your questions down, you can be sure you don't forget to ask them*
- *Write down what you want to know about your disease and treatment*

- *List your most important questions first*

You can get answers to a lot of your questions by asking nurses or physicians' assistants. They are usually easy to talk to and they know a lot about treatment. Most will go out of their way to make sure you get the information you need as quickly as possible.

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## Suggested questions to ask

Questions about hepatitis C:

- *Has the hepatitis C virus damaged my liver?*
- *What is my viral load and genotype? What do these results mean?*
- *What tests will you perform to find out more about my health and the effect that hepatitis C is having on me?*
- *Do I need a liver biopsy?*
- *Should I be vaccinated against hepatitis A and B?*
- *Now that I have hepatitis C, how should I address my other health problems?*
- *(If you're a woman) How does this affect pregnancy?(For both partners) How can we protect each other from infection?*
- *If my spouse has hepatitis C, how will I be affected?*

Questions about treatment:

- *Do I need treatment for hepatitis C?*
- *What are my treatment options?*
- *What are the benefits of each treatment option?*
- *What are the potential risks of each treatment option?*
- *How long will my treatment last?*
- *Do I have any other conditions that will make treatment harder for me?*
- *How often will you need to see me?*
- *What tests will I need during treatment?*
- *What about pregnancy and birth control?*

Questions for your healthcare provider:

- *How much experience do you have treating people with hepatitis C?*
- *Should I see a specialist?*
- *Can I reach you by phone?*
- *Should I contact you directly?*

Related questions (some can be answered by the healthcare provider):

- *Should my family be tested for hepatitis C?*
- *Is it possible for me to spread hepatitis C to others?*
- *How can I protect the people around me from getting hepatitis C?*
- *Do you have any brochures or other printed materials that I can take with me? What are some reputable websites where I can learn more about hepatitis C?*
- *Who should I tell that I have hepatitis C?*
- *Are there some daily habits I should change in order to help me stay healthy?*
- *Do I need to make any changes to my diet?*

Be sure to share any worries or concerns with your healthcare provider. Don't hold anything back. If you don't understand an answer, ask your healthcare provider to explain it in a simpler way.

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## *Review Points*

- *Dress as if you are going to an important meeting*
- *Arrive on time for your appointment*
- *Be alert and pay attention*
- *Find out how much time the healthcare provider has for questions. Respect these limits*
- *Ask the questions that you wrote down before your appointment and address the most important questions first*
- *Take notes*
- *Listen carefully to what your healthcare provider says*
- *Speak up if you are not clear about your treatment*

### **Suggested Reading:**

#### *Calling your Medical Provider*

[www.hcvadvocate.org/hepatitis/factsheets\\_pdf/calling.pdf](http://www.hcvadvocate.org/hepatitis/factsheets_pdf/calling.pdf)

#### *Choosing a Medical Provider*

[www.hcvadvocate.org/hepatitis/factsheets\\_pdf/choosing.pdf](http://www.hcvadvocate.org/hepatitis/factsheets_pdf/choosing.pdf)

#### *Getting Organized for the Health of It*

[www.hcvadvocate.org/hepatitis/factsheets\\_pdf/organized.pdf](http://www.hcvadvocate.org/hepatitis/factsheets_pdf/organized.pdf)

#### *Maximizing Your Medical Appointments*

[www.hcvadvocate.org/hepatitis/factsheets\\_pdf/max\\_appoint.pdf](http://www.hcvadvocate.org/hepatitis/factsheets_pdf/max_appoint.pdf)