



HCSP FACT SHEET

• HCV TREATMENT – SIDE EFFECT MANAGEMENT •

Dizziness and Lightheadedness

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Forward

Dizziness is a term that describes two completely different sensations—*lightheadedness* and *vertigo*. When you have vertigo, it feels like the room is spinning and you may experience balance problems. With lightheadedness, you may feel that you are going to faint.

Lightheadedness is a common side effect of hepatitis C treatment; vertigo is not. There are many causes of dizziness, and although it is rarely serious, report lightheadedness and other side effects to your medical provider. Dizziness can be a symptom of more serious problems, such as a heart attack or excessive bleeding.

Dizziness may be a symptom of hemolytic anemia, a common, potentially serious side effect that occurs during hepatitis C treatment, mostly from ribavirin. Hemolytic anemia occurs when red blood cells are destroyed while being manufactured in the bone marrow. Since red blood transports oxygen to all the body's cells, if you have fewer red blood cells, you may not be getting enough oxygen. The body can handle a certain amount of this; your medical provider will monitor your red blood cells and alert you if they are getting too low.

The most common reason people feel lightheaded is a sudden drop in blood pressure, particularly if you stand up too quickly. Other factors that may cause you to feel dizzy are:

- Dehydration
- Low blood sugar
- Anemia, particularly during exertion
- Insufficient oxygen, such as hyperventilating, holding your breath, or laughing
- Prolonged sitting with a sudden position change
- Anxiety
- Excess heat and perspiration
- Flu, cold, allergy

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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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Dizziness

If you feel dizzy, sit or lie down to avoid fainting. It is better to rest a few minutes, then risk falling and injuring yourself. Here are other tips to help you manage dizziness:

- Stand up slowly and gradually. Wiggle your toes, flex your feet, move your legs before you get up. Squeeze and relax your muscles before, and as you rise. This helps to pump the blood to your upper torso. Do the same when going from lying to sitting position.
- Eat at regular intervals. Food is fuel; avoid going for more than 4 or 5 hours without eating nutritional food.
- Stay hydrated. Be sure you drink enough fluids throughout the day. If your urine is pale yellow, you are probably sufficiently hydrated.
- If you are dizzy because of excess heat or sweating, replenish your electrolytes.
- Stay active. Exercise helps circulation.

- If you are anemic, discuss strategies to manage this with your medical provider.
- Breathe deeply and slowly. Learn relaxation techniques.
- When moving your bowels, avoid straining. Do not hold your breath when bearing down. Fiber, fluid, and staying active will help keep stools loose and easier to pass.
- If you are dizzy because of vomiting, diarrhea, or fever, be sure to address these problems.
- Wear compression leg wear.

Above all, do not be scared. When we get scared, our breathing gets shallow. We need more oxygen, not less when we are lightheaded, so be sure to breathe slowly and deeply, while reminding yourself that this moment will pass. Dizziness is an uncomfortable and sometimes frightening occurrence. However, with a few simple measures, you can cope with lightheadedness.

Related publications:

- **A Guide to Hepatitis C: Treatment Side Effect Management**
www.hcvadvocate.org/hepatitis/factsheets_pdf/Treatment_Side_Effect_Guide.pdf
- **Side Effect Management: Managing HCV Treatment Side Effects**
www.hcvadvocate.org/hepatitis/factsheets_pdf/SEM_SideEffects.pdf

For more information

- **Americans with Disabilities Act**
www.ada.gov
- **Hepatitis C Support Project**
www.hcvadvocate.org
- **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention**
www.cdc.gov
- **Mayo Clinic**
www.mayoclinic.com