



HCSP FACT SHEET

Overview:

Hepatitis C (HCV) Treatment Side Effect Management

—Alan Franciscus, Editor-in-Chief

Foreword

We are now in an era of treatment that has minimal side effects, but it is important to remember that all drugs have side effects and the drugs to treat hepatitis C are no exception. Remember, that not everyone experiences the same side effects, nor are they necessarily severe. Some of the treatment side effects are similar to the symptoms of hepatitis C and the same approaches may be used to control both. Fortunately, there are numerous steps people with HCV can take to manage treatment-related side effects, several of which are discussed below. It is highly recommended that people considering treatment develop a good support system prior to starting HCV therapy. Peer support groups, family, and friends can help get most people through the most difficult times during HCV therapy. It is also important that they notify their medical providers if any side effects begin to get worse or if they persist for a long period of time.

General Tips:

Most people find that sticking to a work schedule helps them to work through most of the the side effects. People also comment that work provides an atmosphere that helps them to stay somewhat upbeat and focused.

Drink plenty of fluids (without caffeine or alcohol); this helps to relieve side effects.

Caution: Alcohol and acetaminophen (also called paracetamol) – an ingredient found in many over-the-counter cold preparations – taken together can cause acute liver failure. Tylenol is a brand of acetaminophen.

Headaches can often be relieved by rest, massage, or application of heat or cold to the back of the neck.

Fever can sometimes be reduced by sponging with lukewarm water (do not use hot or cold water).

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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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Tips for Specific Symptoms:

Fatigue

Rest as much as possible.

Get regular, moderate exercise.

Irritability, depression, anxiety

Seek help from support groups, family, and friends; try relaxation techniques; anxiety may be treated with medications recommended by a doctor; depression may be treated with antidepressants (allow enough time – 2 to 8 weeks – to become effective); consider professional help if symptoms become severe.

Loss of appetite

Eat small meals regularly, even if you have little or no appetite; treat foods as medicine (they are necessary for good health); drink clear juices in addition to water; brush teeth often to help eliminate any bad taste in your mouth.

Weight loss

Choose foods that are high in calories and protein; drink clear juices in addition to water for extra calories; try products designed to promote weight gain, such as nutritional supplements, canned formulas, instant breakfast powders, high-calorie puddings, etc.; add ingredients to increase nutritional value.

Examples:

- Add powdered milk to regular milk, milkshakes, casseroles, soups, eggs, mashed potatoes, hot cereal, and puddings;
- Spread peanut butter on bread;
- Add cooked beans or hard-boiled eggs to soups, casseroles and pasta which already contain cheese or meat;
- Melt cheese on sandwiches, hamburgers, vegetables, rice or noodles.

Nausea

Take over-the-counter medication for nausea as recommended by a doctor; avoid trigger-foods or odors; avoid foods that are spicy, greasy, or deep-fried; eat small amounts of food every 2-3 hours; during periods of nausea, avoid citrus juices (orange, pineapple, and grapefruit)—instead, try clear juices, ginger ale, weak tea, or sports drinks; eat slowly and sip drinks slowly; eat foods at room temperature (neither very hot nor very cold); if morning nausea is a problem, eat some dry crackers when first awakening and get out of bed slowly.

Diarrhea

Try medications such as Immodium and bulking agents such as Metamucil or psyllium bran. Be sure to talk with your medical provider about how these agents affect absorption of medications.

Dry Mouth/Dental Care

Visit your dentist before and after treatment; drink plenty of water or clear fluids (avoid soda, coffee, tea); use artificial saliva; brush and floss your teeth, and rinse your mouth after every meal; use a soft toothbrush.

Rashes

Moisturize daily with over-the-counter lotions; use oatmeal-based lotions; over-the-counter hydrocortisone creams, oral antihistamines and other anti-itch medications. Avoid perfumed soaps or lotions; apply sunscreen when needed; consult with a dermatologist for more serious skin problems or rashes.

Insomnia

Use relaxation techniques that include meditation, warm baths, visualization, and massage; develop consistent routines before going to bed; try over-the-counter medications such as Benadryl, as recommended by a physician. Avoid exercise, vigorous activity, caffeinated drinks or medications that contain

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stimulants prior to bedtime; consult with a physician for prescription medication if insomnia persists for more than a few days.

Some General Considerations:

The information in this fact sheet discusses a wide variety of side effects that some people may experience while on therapy. It is important to remember, though, that side effects from HCV therapy vary considerably from person to person. Everyone experiences some side effects, but very few people experience severe side effects. While some of the side effects can be unpleasant, the vast majority of people can get through treatment if given appropriate care and support. There are even people who feel better while on HCV therapy.

An important part of managing HCV treatment side effects is to be proactive in dealing with the potential side effects and to plan well in advance for any potential problems that may come up during therapy or as a result of therapy. This is best accomplished by enlisting the help and support of family, friends, loved ones, employers and health care providers. Prepare others around you well in advance before starting therapy so that you can be assured of their support and care. It is also a good idea to designate at least one person who can watch for anxiety and/or depression and who can contact family and/or medical professionals if the side effects become severe.

Getting through treatment is a process, which may require drawing on every resource available to you. But remember: it can be done and more importantly it doesn't have to be done alone.

Related publications:

- **Visit our Website Treatment Page**
http://hcvadvocate.org/hepatitis/factsheets_pdf/HCV_Guide.pdf
- **Side Effect Management: Hemolytic Anemia**
http://www.hcvadvocate.org/hepatitis/factsheets_pdf/SEM_anemia.pdf
- **A Guide to Understanding Hepatitis C: 2016**
http://hcvadvocate.org/hepatitis/factsheets_pdf/HCV_Guide.pdf

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