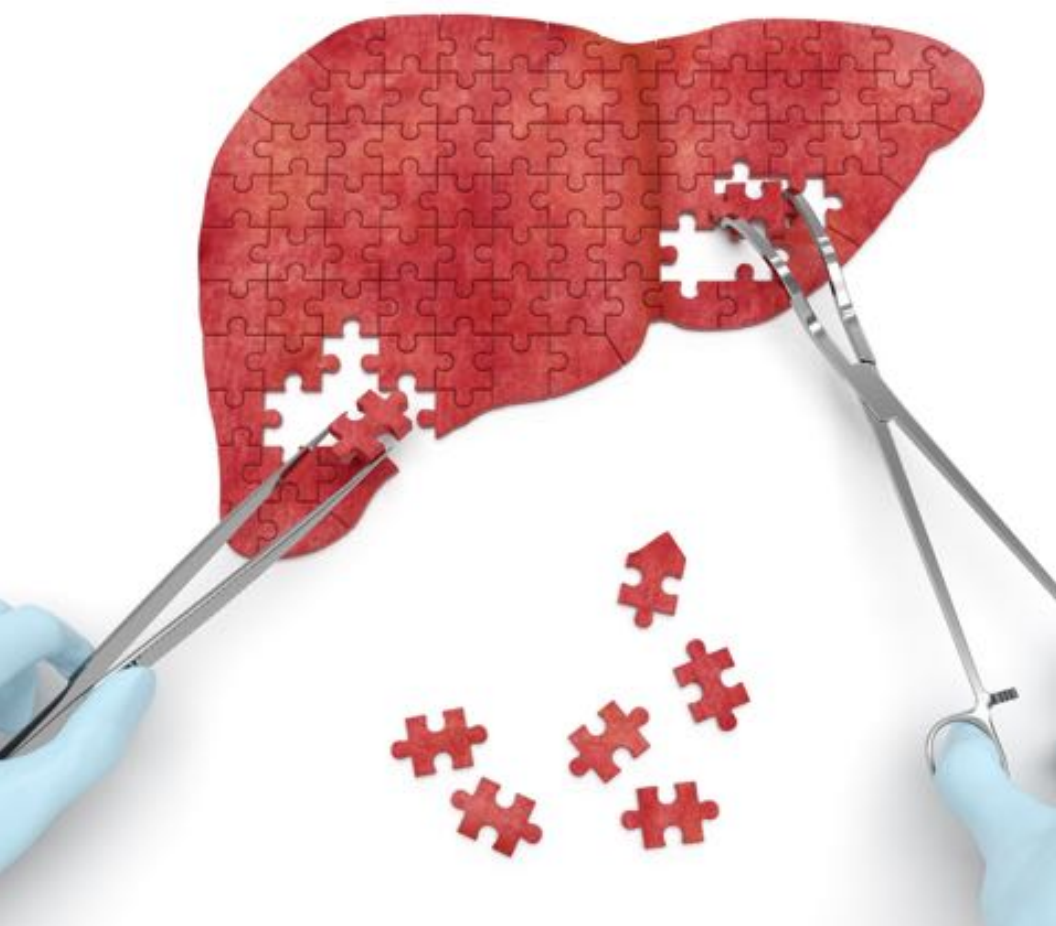


HEPATITIS C

After Diagnosis

A Detailed Guide for Patients, Families, and Friends





What Should I do if I have been Diagnosed with Hepatitis C?

First, take a deep breath. Give yourself some time to process the news but keep in mind the sooner you take action, the more likely you are to have a long and healthy life.

The information in this guide will help answer questions you may have like:

- What is Hepatitis and Hepatitis C?
- What is your liver?
- How did I get it? How does it spread?
- Is there a cure?
- Will I have to take medication for a long time?
- Does the medication cause side effects?
- How do I prevent it?

We hope this information packet answers many of your questions about Hepatitis C and treatment options.

What is Hepatitis C?

“Hepatitis” means inflammation of the liver. When your liver is inflamed or damaged, its function can be affected. Heavy alcohol use, toxins, some medications, and certain medical conditions can cause Hepatitis. However, Hepatitis is most often caused by a virus. In the United States, the most common types of viral Hepatitis are Hepatitis A, Hepatitis B, and Hepatitis C.

The Liver

The liver is one of the largest and most important organs in a person's body. It is about the size of a football and weighs about 3 pounds in the average-sized person. The liver is located on the upper right side of the body, behind the lower ribs.



Almost all the blood in a person's body passes through the liver. The liver performs hundreds of functions, including storing nutrients; removing waste products and worn-out cells from the blood; filtering and processing chemicals in food, alcohol and medications; and producing bile, a solution that helps digest fats and eliminate waste products.

What is Hepatitis C?

Hepatitis C is an infection of the liver that results from the Hepatitis C virus. Acute Hepatitis C refers to the first several months after someone is infected. Acute infection can range in severity from a very mild illness with few or no symptoms to a serious condition requiring hospitalization. For reasons that are not known, about 20% of people are able to clear, or get rid of,

the virus without treatment in the first 6 months. Unfortunately, most people who get infected are not able to clear the Hepatitis C virus and develop a chronic, or lifelong infection. Over time, chronic Hepatitis C can cause serious health problems including liver disease, liver failure, and even liver cancer.

How does Hepatitis C Spread?

Hepatitis C is usually spread when blood from a person infected with the Hepatitis C virus enters the body of someone who is not infected. Today, most people become infected with Hepatitis C by sharing needles, syringes, or any other equipment used to inject drugs. Sexual transmission of Hepatitis C is also possible. Having a sexually transmitted disease or HIV, sex with multiple partners, or rough sex appears to increase a person's risk for Hepatitis C. Hepatitis C can also be spread when getting tattoos and body piercings in unlicensed facilities, informal settings, or with non-sterile instruments.

Can Hepatitis C be Cured?

Yes. There have been new advances in treatment for Hepatitis C, including highly effective medications. Treatment is also easier than in the past because it usually involves taking pills only (no injections). Also, there are fewer side effects, and treatment typically takes 8-12 weeks. However, treatment depends on many factors, so it is important to see a clinician experienced in treating Hepatitis C.



DAP has specially trained staff member who we call - *Early Intervention Specialists (EIS)*. These experts will help you get the right care, schedule your first visit with an experienced clinician and support you through your entire treatment. EIS can also assist you with insurance guidance, transportation assistance, food assistance, and referrals to access other community resources.



Hepatitis C Treatment: YOUR EIS worker

- There is a good chance treatment can cure Hepatitis C, so the virus is no longer in your body. If you're cured, you will no longer pass the virus to others, but it's important to take steps to prevent getting re-infected. Being cured does not mean you can not get infected again.
- Treatment works best when you take your medication on schedule. This is called medication adherence. If you skip or miss some pills, the treatment may not work. Medication adherence is important, so before you commit to treatment make sure that

you have a plan to keep on track. **EIS staff can help you create that adherence plan.**

- If you are HIV-positive, getting treated for Hepatitis C can improve your overall health, make your HIV medications more effective, and increase HIV treatment options.
- Some people may be initially denied access to treatment, based on drug or alcohol use, or degree of liver damage. If you are denied access to treatment by your insurance company, you have the right to an appeal. DAP can help you through the appeal. If you are denied coverage, don't give up. Contact EIS to help you through the appeal process.

How can Hepatitis C be Prevented?

Although there is currently no vaccine to prevent Hepatitis C, there are ways to reduce the risk of becoming infected with the Hepatitis C virus.

- Avoid sharing or reusing needles, syringes or any other equipment to prepare and inject drugs, steroids, hormones, or other substances. Hepatitis C can survive in a syringe up to 63 days.
- Do not use personal items that may have come into contact with an infected person's blood, even amounts too small to see, such as razors, nail clippers, toothbrushes, or glucose monitors. Hepatitis C can live outside the body for up to 6 weeks.
- Do not get tattoos or body piercings from an unlicensed facility or in an informal setting.





Liver Care Tips

- Moderate-to-heavy drinking can increase your risk for developing serious liver damage. Since there is no safe amount of alcohol a person with Hepatitis C can drink, reducing the amount you drink, or not drinking at all, is the safest option.
- Tell your medical provider all your over-the-counter medicines, prescribed medications, and herbal supplements because some may be hard on your liver and have adverse effects with your Hep C medication.
- There is no vaccine for Hepatitis C, but there are vaccinations for Hepatitis A and Hepatitis B. If you have Hepatitis C, get vaccinated for both Hepatitis A and B to protect your liver.
- Because of the stigma attached to Hepatitis C and injection drug use, telling your friends and family can be difficult. We recommend attending Hepatitis C services and support groups so you can have access to important resources and share your feelings in a safe, non-judgmental, and confidential environment.

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