



HEPATITIS C

Information, advice, testing,
support & training service

PREPARING FOR AND GETTING THROUGH TREATMENT

Hepatitis C treatment has dramatically improved in the past few years with the introduction of pegylated interferon plus ribavirin therapy. It is now possible to eradicate the virus in about 50% of people who receive HCV treatment. However, HCV medications have many side effects, which can lead to dose reduction or discontinuation of therapy.

Successful HCV treatment requires staying on the prescribed dose of medications for the prescribed period of time. Side effects that interfere with quality of life can hamper this goal, so it's important to manage side effects early, aggressively, and appropriately. The good news is that the management of treatment-related side effects has also dramatically improved making treatment easier to tolerate.

Fortunately, there are many simple and practical steps you can take to avoid or reduce serious side effects. One of the most important strategies is to manage side effects before they become serious.

Important Note: Report all side effects to a clinical specialist as soon as possible. Treatment side effects should always be evaluated and managed by healthcare professionals.

It is important to remember that not everyone experiences the same side effects, not all side effects necessarily severe. In fact, some people may experience few or no side effects. However, it is important to be prepared for the worst, and hopefully your symptoms will be less severe and easier to manage.

Another important component of successful side effect management is to establish a good support system prior to starting HCV therapy. Peer support groups, family, and friends can help most people get through the most difficult times during HCV therapy.

Many people have completed therapy and remain free of HCV. Just completing treatment is a success in and of itself.

Maintaining a Positive Attitude

Maintaining a positive attitude while undergoing treatment may be difficult, but it is essential, and should be at the top of your list for side effect management.

There is no scientific data at this time to support the notion that a positive attitude will have an impact on Hepatitis C or treatment outcomes. However, many patients report that attitude was an important part of staying on therapy. Strive to maintain a positive attitude, but be realistic. No one can achieve perfection 100% of the time. A positive attitude is a process and not a final goal. Do not set yourself up for failure. This is a time when you need to be gentle with yourself.

Attitude

How do you maintain a positive attitude? There are many steps you can take. For example, before beginning therapy, make a list of the reasons why you are receiving treatment and read the list often.

Reasons to undergo therapy include:

- To improve your health
- To live longer
- To feel that you have done all that you can do
- To simply get rid of the virus
- To put hepatitis C and its treatment behind you
- To have children
- To reduce symptoms and increase your quality of life
- To prevent liver cirrhosis and liver cancer
- To help you reach personal and professional goals

Starting the day off with a positive attitude is half the battle. When you wake up in the morning, try to think of something you are grateful for in your life. Substitute positive thoughts for negative ones. Repeat them to yourself even if you do not believe them at first.

- Instead of thinking, "I'm overwhelmed," say, "I am doing the best I can"
- Instead of thinking, "I'm tired," substitute, "This will eventually pass"
- Instead of saying, "I can't do this," try saying, "I can do this because it is only temporary"

In the evening when you are going to sleep, look back on your day and define what made you feel better and what made you feel worse. Congratulate yourself for getting through the day! Remind yourself that you are one more day closer to your goal of completing treatment.

Support

Staying positive while on therapy would be difficult if a person did not have an established support system established in place well before starting treatment. It is important to get support from as many areas as possible. Support can come from many sources, including family, friends, co-workers, clinical specialists, and peers found in support groups. If you do not already attend a hepatitis C support group, consider joining one before starting therapy.

Personal Appearance

Keeping a positive attitude is easier when you take good care of your body, including your appearance.

When you look good, you generally feel better. If you wake up in the morning feeling achy and out of sorts, you may feel better if you take the steps to start your day off feeling fresh, this will have a positive influence on your emotions for the entire day.

Try these strategies:

- Shower or bathe daily; spoil yourself with bath products that smell and feel good
- Light a candle and listen to soothing music
- Take care of your hands and nails
- Moisturize, moisturize, moisturize
- Try a different hairstyle that is attractive, easy to take care of, and will be flattering in case you experience hair loss
- Brush and floss your teeth regularly
- Men: shave or trim facial hair
- Women: if you regularly use make-up, continue while on treatment
- Get dressed even if you will be lying on the couch; choose comfortable clothing
- Wear colors that make you feel good

Exercise

Exercise is one of the most important components of health maintenance, and this remains true during therapy. Physical activity will help you stay positive and focused and improve your general well being. Moderation is the key to physical activity. Exercise comes in many forms. You do not have to spend an enormous amount of money or run a marathon to stay fit. Try low-impact activities such as:

- Stretching
- Walking
- Swimming
- Dancing
- Gardening
- Yoga
- Pilates
- T'ai chi or qigong

Relaxation

Being on HCV treatment can be stressful. Many people feel overwhelmed by trying to remember to take their medications, dealing with side effects, continuing to work at a job, and handling family responsibilities. It is important to build in time for relaxation.

Try some of these strategies to help you relax:

- Meditation
- Light a candle and listen to music
- Instead of holding your breath when you feel stressed out, try breathing in and out gently and slowly
- Sit or walk in a place of natural beauty, such as a beach, forest, garden, or park
- Have a massage

Social Events

Treatment-related side effects and the everyday demands of life can create some uncertainty. Maintain a social life, but be realistic when scheduling dates or appointments. The surest way to become depressed is to become isolated from family and friends.

However, it is important to talk with family and friends before starting treatment so that they can understand and be supportive if you need to cancel or adjust your plans.

Sometimes just knowing that you can cancel or leave a social activity early may help reduce stress. Try to relax and enjoy the time spent with friends and loved ones.

Other Daily Strategies

Engage in activities that make you laugh. Do something you enjoy. Use humor during difficult moments to get a better sense of perspective. Laughter may not be “the best medicine,” but it helps. Indulge in a favorite hobby. Most of all learn to pamper yourself, and let others pamper you, too.

Get ready for treatment

Before you even start treatment prepare yourself. Get into a good routine with positive thinking, regular exercise and relaxation.