



HEPATITIS C

Information, advice, testing,
support & training service

SIDE EFFECTS – Coping with Aches and Pains

Flu-Like Symptoms

Interferon is a natural chemical produced by our immune systems. When we fight a cold or flu, we feel the effects of our own internal interferon: fever, chills, malaise, body aches, and headaches. Manufactured interferon causes the same effects. Most people feel these symptoms for several hours or days after their first interferon injection. These flu-like symptoms generally last for a few hours, but may extend into the next day.

Some people have flu-like symptoms after every injection, while others have seemingly random symptoms that do not follow a regular pattern. However, some patients never have flu-like symptoms, or might have them only after their first injection. Although infrequent, some patients experience many of these side effects throughout the course of their HCV treatment.

Tips for managing flu-like symptoms:

- Schedule injections for just before bedtime
- Do not schedule the first injection the night before a major event
- Drink sufficient water throughout the day before your injection and throughout treatment
- Put layers of blankets and clothes at your bedside to manage chills
- If your teeth chatter, remove dentures or other breakable dental appliances
- To reduce fever, stay cool, but do not get chilled, removing layers of blankets and clothing, and lukewarm sponge baths can provide relief
- Get plenty of rest
- Remember that these initial reactions are only temporary (typically lasting four to eight hours) and that losing a good night's sleep is not the end of the world. Don't forget, you are investing in your future

Body Aches

Muscle, joint, and body aches are common side effects of interferon treatment. Some people feel these effects just after their first injection. Others experience body aches throughout treatment, either intermittently or continuously. There are several self-help measures you can try. First, get a proper diagnosis for the cause of pain before beginning a self-help regimen. Many conditions can cause body aches, so a proper diagnosis is the first and most important step in good medical care.

Tips for managing body aches:

- Ask your physician about the use of prescription and non-prescription medications to help with pain
- Try gentle stretching exercises
- Avoid prolonged periods of inactivity
- Apply heat or ice packs
- Try warm or hot baths. Spoil yourself with a bubble bath. (Beware: hot baths can dry the skin)
- Massage may be helpful

Some dietary supplements are purported to relieve inflammation and arthritis. If this interests you, discuss the issue with your clinical specialist.

Headaches

About 60% of patients experience headaches while on HCV therapy. Although in some cases the headaches associated with HCV treatment can be debilitating, most people find that they have mild headaches that come and go. If you experience a persistent or ongoing headache for more than 24 hours, contact your clinical specialist immediately.

There are many strategies to help relieve the headache pain. First, it is important to rule out any causes other than treatment side effects that may be causing or contributing to a headache. Stress, insomnia, and diet can all induce headaches. After ruling out other possible causes, there are some simple steps that may help prevent the occurrence or reduce the severity of a headache.

Tips for preventing headaches:

- Limit caffeine intake by avoiding coffee, teas, and/or fizzy drinks, especially in the late afternoon or evening
- Drink lots of water or other clear fluids
- Avoid loud noises, bright lights, and strong odors
- Try to go to sleep and wake up at the same time each day
- Eat all meals, especially breakfast, at roughly the same time each day
- Pamper yourself during stressful times
- Get moderate exercise regularly, at least three times per week
- Remember to play, relax, and enjoy life
- Try to find a pattern or the reason for the headache, such as food, stress, or other trigger factors

Ask your clinical specialist for a list of over-the-counter or prescription medications. Never self-medicate—this can be a recipe for disaster! If you take certain types of pain medication, you may develop rebound headaches, which could be as bad as or worse than the original headache.

Once a headache has started, the same strategies that prevent headaches can also help ease the pain.

Tips for relieving headaches:

- Depending on the type of headache, a cool damp cloth (or frozen peas) applied to the back of the neck or forehead may provide some relief
- Wet a cotton wool pad with cool water and 1 drop of peppermint and 1 drop of chamomile essential oils and apply to the forehead
- Place a lavender-scented aromatherapy pillow on your eyes while you rest.
- Learn acupuncture points for headache relief
- Try relaxation techniques such as biofeedback, prayer, or meditation to help with the pain and stress that come with a headache
- Occasionally headaches respond to small amounts of caffeine. Black tea, coffee and cola drinks all contain caffeine. Try this only occasionally, since caffeine can also cause headaches. Also, do not try in the late afternoon or evening, since caffeine can keep you awake at night