



HEPATITIS C

Information, advice, testing,
support & training service

Side effects – eating, appetite and digestion

Nausea

Nausea can be a symptom of hepatitis C itself, as well as HCV therapy. It can also be caused by many other factors, such as stress, headaches, other viruses or bacteria, alcohol, lack of food and drink, or overindulgence in food and drink. Regardless of the cause, nausea can have a serious impact on a person's well being and quality of life. It can also affect how you take your medications and even whether you will stay on therapy.

Nausea is typically described as feeling sick to the stomach, and can range from general queasiness to a strong urge to vomit. Although vomiting is not a common treatment side effect, bloody or persistent vomiting requires urgent medical care.

It is important to find out what is causing nausea so that appropriate steps can be taken to control it. Try to figure out what triggers your nausea. The solution may be as simple as altering eating and drinking habits.

Tips for controlling nausea:

- If morning nausea is a problem, eat some dry crackers when you first wake up, and get out of bed slowly
- Avoid foods and odors that trigger nausea
- Pass on spicy, greasy, and deep-fried foods
- Eat small amounts of food every few hours rather than two or three large meals per day
- During periods of nausea, avoid acidic juices (orange, grapefruit,); instead, try clear juices like apple, ginger ale or herbal tea.
- Drink and eat slowly
- Consume foods at room temperature (neither very hot nor very cold)
- Take over-the-counter medication for nausea as recommended by your clinical specialist
- Use peppermint, chamomile, or ginger tea to help calm your stomach
- Try raw or cooked ginger
- Suck on ginger sweets or lollipops (available at most health food stores)
- Try relaxation techniques
- Exercise lightly, such as walking or yoga
- Try acupuncture or acupressure
- Wear acupressure wristbands

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When nausea improves to the point where you feel able to eat, choose bland, easily digestible foods, such as bananas, rice, toast, and tea. If nausea interferes with your ability to take your medications, does not lessen, or becomes worse, contact your clinical specialist. There are many prescription medicines to help treat nausea. It is important to be as proactive as possible so that you can focus on maintaining your HCV therapy. Some of the simplest tips can make a huge difference in how you feel.

Diarrhea

Diarrhea is defined as loose or watery stools that occur three or more times per day. In addition to being a potential side effect of interferon and ribavirin treatment, many factors can cause diarrhea, including bacterial and viral infections, drugs, certain foods or beverages, and anxiety.

As with nausea, diarrhea can greatly affect your overall health and adherence to treatment, so it is important to treat diarrhea as soon as symptoms appear. Diarrhea can lead to dehydration and reduced quality of life, as well as contributing to nutrient deficiencies.

Notify your clinical specialist if you experience any of the following:

- Severe diarrhea that lasts longer than two days
- Dramatic weight loss (five pounds or more) that occurs in one day
- Blood in the stool or around the anal area
- Uncontrolled fever, fever higher than 100.6°F or fever that lasts more than 24 hours
- Severe stomach or intestinal cramping

Tips for controlling diarrhea:

- Drink plenty of clear fluids, such as water, weak tea, or broth (vegetable, chicken, or beef)
- Eat small frequent meals
- Consume foods that are high in potassium, such as bananas and potatoes
- Stay away from high-fiber foods, such as whole-grain breads and cereals
- Avoid spicy, fried, and greasy foods
- Stay away from very hot or very cold foods
- Abstain from alcohol, caffeine drinks, and tobacco products
- Choose bland, easily digestible foods, such as bananas, rice, toast, and tea

Diarrhea can dry and irritate the anal area. After a bowel movement, wash and rinse the area with warm soapy water or baby wipes and pat dry with a soft tissue or cloth. Apply a water-repellent cream around the anal area to help relieve pain and irritation. Sitting in a bathtub filled with warm water may relieve pain and discomfort, as well as help you relax. Report severe diarrhea to your clinical specialist immediately. Your doctor may recommend over-the-counter medication like Imodium or a prescription drug to treat diarrhea. Do not self-medicate. Controlling diarrhea is an important part of taking care of

you. It will ensure that you stay healthy and feel better, and will help optimise your HCV treatment outcome.

Weight Loss

Severe weight loss can be a serious problem during hepatitis C treatment. Getting proper nutrition from a healthy diet is an important part of maintaining your overall health during this time. A majority of people undergoing HCV therapy report mild to moderate weight loss. Unfortunately, the weight loss associated with HCV treatment may be a combination of regular weight loss and a reduction in body muscle mass. For this reason, including fluid and food as part of your medical regimen will help maintain good health.

Exercise is also important, since it increases muscle mass, stimulates the appetite, helps keep the immune system strong, and combats depression and anxiety. Besides HCV therapy itself, many factors can contribute to weight loss, including taste changes, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, depression, or an overactive thyroid. To determine the underlying causes weight loss should be evaluated by a clinical specialist.

Tips for preventing weight loss:

- Consult with a dietician or nutritionist for information on healthy food choices
- Choose foods that are high in calories and protein
- Drink clear juices in addition to water for extra calories
- Add powdered milk to regular milk, milkshakes, casseroles, soups, eggs, mashed potatoes, hot cereal, and puddings
- Add cooked beans or hard-boiled eggs to soups, casseroles, and pasta that already contains cheese or meat
- Try products designed to promote weight gain, such as nutritional supplements, canned formulas, protein powders, instant breakfast drinks or power bars

If you continue to lose weight despite such strategies, talk to your clinical specialist about medications to help with this. Some antidepressants can stimulate appetite while helping with other medical issues. If you have severe weight loss (five pounds or more in a week), shortness of breath, or dizziness, consult with a clinical specialist immediately.

Dehydration

The importance of drinking an adequate amount of water during HCV treatment cannot be overstated. Many of the side effects associated with interferon based therapy can be greatly reduced simply by drinking water.

Can you drink too much water?

Yes. Drinking excessive amounts of water can affect the body's electrolyte balance, which could lead to serious health problems. Therefore, it is

important to check with your clinical specialist before dramatically increasing the amount you drink every day.

The positive effect of drinking water on side effect management is quite substantial. Many people taking HCV therapy report that they experience a marked decrease in side effects on days when they drink plenty of water, compared to days when they drink little or no water. It is recommended that you drink water right before and right after self-injection and stay well hydrated throughout the week.

The benefits of drinking water include:

- Flushing out wastes and transporting nutrients
- Regulating body temperature
- Hydrating the skin, which helps reduce the dry skin syndrome caused by HCV medications
- Lubricates the respiratory tract, which helps relieve the cough some people get while using ribavirin
- Aids the digestive system, helping to prevent constipation and other problems
- Replaces fluids lost during a bout of vomiting or diarrhea
- Counters the reduced natural saliva production caused by HCV medication, which can increase the risk of dental cavities and diseases
- Keeps your gums hydrated and rinses away harmful bacteria in the mouth

Tips for drinking enough water:

- Drink water before you feel thirsty. This will help you to stay well hydrated, since thirst is a sign of dehydration
- Drink water instead of caffeine drinks such as fizzy drinks, tea, and coffee. Caffeinated beverages deplete the body of fluids, which necessitates drinking even more water
- Keep water in places you frequent at home, in the office, and in the car
- Add a slice of lemon, lime, mint, ginger, or cucumber to add flavor to the water
- Sip water throughout the day instead of gulping it, to give your body more time to absorb it

How Much Water?

There are many ways to calculate a healthy person's minimum daily water needs. While on HCV therapy, you should drink at least the daily requirement and possibly more, depending on your clinical specialist's advice. One method of calculating your minimum daily water requirement is to divide your body weight in pounds by two. That number represents the total number of ounces you should strive to consume each day. For instance, a person who weighs 150 pounds will need to drink 75 ounces of water per day (nine 8 oz glasses, or slightly more than two liters per day).

How Can You Keep Track?

Numerous studies have measured the amount of water people drink daily. It has been shown that the amount of water most people drink each day is much less than they need to stay healthy and well hydrated. Also, people usually drink less water than they think they do, because most people do not keep track of their daily consumption. For this reason, it is important to keep a record of how much you drink.

Tips for keeping track of water intake:

- Fill a bottle with fresh water. Write down the volume of water the bottle holds and how many times you refill it throughout the day.
- Buy commercial water bottles that list the fluid content. Fill up or buy enough bottles to meet your daily requirement. Set the bottles in plain view to help you remember to drink all the bottles.

Taste Changes

Changes in the way foods and drinks taste is a real problem for many people on HCV therapy. Patients usually describe this as having a metallic taste in the mouth. Other medical conditions, such as a zinc or vitamin B12 deficiency can cause this. Report taste changes to your clinical specialist and dentist so they can rule out other causes. Taste changes can affect many areas of life, since food is such an integral part of our social lives and overall health. To sustain wellness, it is important to maintain a healthy diet throughout treatment. Treat food as part of your medical regime.

Tips for managing taste changes:

- Drink plenty of water
- Eat with plastic, wooden, or porcelain utensils instead of metal ones
- Use non-metallic cookware, such as glass
- Add tart flavorings such as vinegar, lemon, lime, or orange juice to your food
- Eat cold foods rather than hot ones
- Marinate meats to enhance or disguise flavors
- Avoid strong foods and odors
- Try foods that are high in protein, such as eggs, tofu, chicken, fish, or nuts
- Sample various dairy products, such as cheese, yogurt, cottage cheese, or ice cream
- Sorbet, sherbets, frozen fruit bars, and smoothies may taste better to you
- Flavor your food with horseradish or mustard
- Avoid canned foods
- If a food does not taste good to you, take a break from it for a while
- Try a new food or one that you did not like in the past. You might find that you enjoy it while you are going through HCV treatment
- Eat crisp, cold foods, such as peppers, and apples

- Before eating, rinse your mouth with soda water, warm salt water, or a mouthwash made of ½ teaspoon salt and ½ teaspoon baking soda in 1 cup of warm water
- Do not eat or drink flavored foods, especially citrus, immediately before or after brushing your teeth
- Take good care of your teeth, brush, floss, and get regular dental check-ups
- Remember, your sense of taste will return after you have completed HCV treatment

Mouth Sores

During HCV treatment, some patients complain of mouth soreness. This may include sores or ulcers on the gums, cheeks, and tongue, possibly accompanied by redness. Before treating mouth sores, consult your clinical specialist to obtain a proper diagnosis. Many factors can cause mouth sores, and it is important to understand what caused the problem before it can be fixed.

How do you cure mouth sores? The answer is you probably can't. There are remedies that can make them less painful or speed up healing, but as with the common cold there is no reliable cure for the common mouth sore. The exception is if your particular variety of sores is caused by an underlying condition that can be remedied. Sores that are associated with food sensitivities, medications, nutritional deficiencies, or the use of sodium lauryl sulfate can be treated if these conditions are resolved.

There are several home remedies you can try. Talk to your clinical specialist about these suggestions, particularly prior to using any herbs or supplements.

Tips for preventing and relieving mouth sores:

- Maintain oral hygiene, be gentle when brushing your teeth, but don't skip it
- Avoid dental products that contain sodium lauryl sulfate
- Drink lots of water. Adequate hydration is important for health maintenance, particularly during HCV treatment
- Do not drink liquids that are excessively hot. Ice or frozen juice bars may soothe mouth sores
- Try over-the-counter products that numb sores.
- Eat well. Discuss with your doctor whether you should take a multivitamin or other dietary supplement.
- Avoid foods that are hard, crunchy, spicy, salty, or acidic
- Reduce stress
- Keep a food diary to see if a particular food is causing mouth sores. Try eliminating suspected foods
- Try tea. Black and some herbal teas are high in tannin. A used tea bag placed on a sore may provide relief
- Infuse sage and chamomile in water, and use as a mouthwash four to six times daily
- Try raspberry, peppermint, and licorice

- Try taking lactobacillus. These harmless bacteria, sometimes called probiotics, are part of the natural intestinal flora. There are many brands of lactobacillus (Although relatively safe, it is not recommended if you have a prosthetic heart valve or valvular heart disease, asthma, an allergy to dairy products, or are pregnant, trying to get pregnant, or breast-feeding)

Important Note: Echinacea may speed mouth sore healing, but should be avoided during HCV treatment, if you are HIV-positive, or if you have an autoimmune condition.

Dental Hygiene

Poor dental hygiene can lead to tooth decay, gum disease, mouth blisters, and other problems. It is generally recommended that a dental exam be completed before beginning HCV therapy. People are also encouraged to have procedures such as dental fillings, gum surgery, or root canals well before starting HCV treatment. During HCV therapy, natural saliva production is decreased, which can lead to increased risk for dental problems such as tooth decay and infection.

Tips for maintaining good dental health:

- Brush teeth regularly (before and after meals) with a soft brush
- Floss on a regular basis, but be gentle so that your gums are not injured
- Use saliva substitute products if necessary
- Self-examine your teeth, gums, and all areas of the mouth frequently
- Rinse out your mouth often, especially after meals
- Suck on sugar free sweets, such as peppermints, to produce more saliva
- Schedule an additional teeth cleaning during HCV treatment. If you regularly see your dentist twice a year, consider going three times