THINGS YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT HEPATITIS C

What Is Hepatitis C?
• Hepatitis C is a virus that causes inflammation of the liver.
• It impairs the liver’s ability to do its job, which includes helping to digest food, storing energy and nutrients, removing harmful chemicals from the blood, and fighting infection.
• Over many years, the infection causes progressive scarring of the liver.
• Hepatitis C is one of five hepatitis infections (labeled A, B, C, D, and E); each affects the body differently.

What Are the Signs and Symptoms of Hepatitis C?
• Dark urine, fatigue, jaundice (yellowing of the skin and eyes), abdominal pain, loss of appetite, and nausea or vomiting may occur.
• Often symptoms are absent until serious liver damage has occurred.
• Cirrhosis (advanced scarring of the liver) and liver cancer may develop.

Who Is at Risk for Hepatitis C Infection?
• Current or former injection-drug users.
• Recipients of blood transfusions before 1992.
• Sexual partners of anyone infected with hepatitis C.
• Health care workers exposed to infected people.
• Dialysis recipients.
• Children of a hepatitis C-infected mother.

How Do You Know If You Have Hepatitis C?
• If you think you could be infected, get tested as soon as possible.

How Is It Treated?
• There is no vaccine for hepatitis C.
• The combination of two medicines, interferon and ribavirin, can slow or stop the disease.
• If you don’t recover completely, you have chronic hepatitis C, which means your body can’t get rid of the virus.
• Avoiding alcohol can slow the progress of the liver disease.
• Being vaccinated against hepatitis A and B viruses may also help.
• In severe cases, liver transplantation may be needed.

For More Information
http://digestive.niddk.nih.gov/ddiseases/pubs/hepc_ez/
Patient information page titled “What I Need to Know About Hepatitis C” from the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (NIDDK), in English and Spanish.

www.niaid.nih.gov/topics/hepatitis/hepatitisc/Pages/Default.aspx
Information on hepatitis C causes, transmission, and symptoms from the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases.

Questions to ask your doctors about the diagnosis and treatment of hepatitis C from the Department of Veterans Affairs.