

Hepatitis C



What Is Hepatitis C?

Hepatitis C is an infection of the liver caused by a virus. When the liver is infected, it does not work as well as it should. Hepatitis C can spread from one person to another through blood or bodily fluids. You are at risk for hepatitis C if you:

- Use injected drugs
- Have had long-term kidney dialysis
- Have HIV
- Were born to a mother with hepatitis C
- Have unprotected sex with multiple partners
- Had a blood transfusion before 1992



What Are the Warning Signs of Hepatitis C?

When first infected with hepatitis C, most people do not have any symptoms. However, some people can have symptoms soon after being infected, including:

- Fever
- Feeling tired
- Loss of appetite
- Feeling sick to your stomach
- Joint pain

If you have had hepatitis C for a long time, you may have more serious symptoms. These symptoms could be from liver damage, liver failure, or liver cancer.



How Is Hepatitis C Diagnosed?

Your doctor will order a blood test to see if you have hepatitis C. If you are diagnosed with hepatitis C, you may need a liver biopsy to see how much damage there is to the liver. For this test, a small needle will be used to take a tiny sample of your liver for testing.



How Is Hepatitis C Treated?

- There is no vaccine for hepatitis C. Call your doctor immediately if you think that you have come in contact with hepatitis C.
- You should rest, drink fluids, and eat a nutritious diet while your body fights the infection. Most people need medicine to help fight off the infection.
- Medicines for hepatitis C are called antiviral therapy. These medicines help your body fight off the virus.
- Newer medicines can completely cure some people of hepatitis C. These can be very expensive depending on your insurance benefits. Talk to your healthcare professional if you are worried about the costs of medicine. They may be able to help.
- If your liver is severely damaged, you may need a liver transplant. This requires a doctor to remove your damaged liver and replace it with a healthier liver.

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Questions for My Doctor

- Should I be tested for hepatitis C?
- How can I be infected if I do not feel sick?
- What treatment is best for me?
- What are the side effects of antiviral medicines?
- Is there a cure for hepatitis C?
- What should I do to protect others from catching hepatitis C?
- What should I do if I cannot afford my medicines?



Bottom Line

- Hepatitis C is caused by a virus that damages the liver. It spreads from one person to another through blood and bodily fluids.
- Many people have no symptoms of hepatitis C. Symptoms can include fever, feeling tired, loss of appetite, feeling sick to your stomach, and joint pain. After many years, the virus can cause damage to your liver.
- A blood test for the hepatitis C virus can show if you have the virus.
- Treatment may include antiviral therapy. Newer medicines can completely cure some people of the virus. If your liver is severely damaged, you may need a liver transplant.

For More Information

- **MedlinePLUS:**
www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/hepatitisc.html
- **National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases:**
http://digestive.niddk.nih.gov/ddiseases/pubs/hepc_ez/
- **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:**
www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/HCV/PDFs/HepCGeneralFactSheet-BW.pdf

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