

Hepatitis C: After Your Visit

Your Care Instructions

Hepatitis C is an infection of the liver caused by a virus. The hepatitis C virus spreads when blood or body fluids from an infected person enter another person's body. This occurs most often by sharing needles that have the virus on them. In the past, people got hepatitis C through blood transfusions and organ transplants. Since 1992, all donated blood and organs have been screened for hepatitis C, so this is now very rare.

Hepatitis C also can spread (although it is less common) through sex, and sharing items such as razor blades or toothbrushes. Needles used for tattoos and body piercings can also spread the infection.

Hepatitis C does not always cause symptoms. But you may feel tired and have a headache, sore muscles, nausea, pain in the upper right belly, yellowish skin, and dark urine. Your doctor may prescribe antiviral medicine. Home treatment can help ease symptoms. Long-term infection with hepatitis C can lead someday to severe liver damage. Because of this, it is important that you go to your follow-up appointments.

Follow-up care is a key part of your treatment and safety. Be sure to make and go to all appointments, and call your doctor if you are having problems. It's also a good idea to know your test results and keep a list of the medicines you take.

How can you care for yourself at home?

- ε If your doctor prescribes antiviral medicine, take it exactly as prescribed. Call your doctor if you think you are having a problem with your medicine.
- ε Do not drink alcohol. Alcohol can damage the liver. Tell your doctor if you need help to quit. Counseling, support groups, and sometimes medicines can help you stay sober.
- ε Do not take drugs or herbal medicines. They can make liver problems worse.
- ε Make sure your doctor knows all of the medicines you take. Some medicines, such as acetaminophen (Tylenol), can make liver problems worse. Do not take any new medicines—including over-the-counter ones—unless your doctor tells you to.
- ε Maintain a healthy lifestyle. Get plenty of exercise if you feel up to it. Eat a healthy diet.
- ε Drink plenty of fluids, enough so that your urine is light yellow or clear like water. If you have kidney, heart, or liver disease and have to limit fluids, talk with your doctor before you increase the amount of fluids you drink.
- ε Get the vaccines (if you have not already) to protect yourself from hepatitis A and hepatitis B, influenza, and pneumococcus.
- ε Hepatitis can cause itching. Keep cool, stay out of the sun, and wear cotton clothing. Talk to your doctor about using over-the-counter medicines, such as diphenhydramine (Benadryl) or chlorpheniramine (Chlor-Trimeton). Follow the instructions on the label.
- ε If you feel depressed, talk to your doctor about treatment. Many people who have long-term illnesses get depressed. Keep in mind that antiviral medicine can make depression worse.

To avoid spreading hepatitis C to others

- ε Tell the people that you live with or have sex with about your illness as soon as possible.
- ε Do not share needles to inject drugs. Do not share other equipment (such as cotton, spoons, and water) with others. Find out whether a needle exchange program is available in your area, and use it. Get into a drug treatment program.
- ε Practice safer sex. Reduce your number of sex partners if you have more than one. Unless you are in a long-term relationship in which neither partner has sex with anyone else, always use latex condoms when you have sex.
- ε Do not donate blood or blood products, organs, semen, or eggs (ova).
- ε Make sure that all equipment is sterilized if you get a tattoo, have your body pierced, or have acupuncture.

- ε Do not share your personal items, such as razors, toothbrushes, towels, or nail files.
- ε Tell your doctor, dentist, and anyone else who may come in contact with your blood about your illness.
- ε Keep any cuts, scrapes, or blisters covered to prevent others from coming in contact with your blood and other body fluids.
- ε Wash your hands—and any object that has come in contact with your blood—thoroughly with water and soap.

When should you call for help?

Call 911 anytime you think you may need emergency care. For example, call if:

- ε You passed out (lost consciousness).
- ε You have severe trouble breathing.
- ε You feel very confused and cannot think clearly.
- ε You vomit blood or what looks like coffee grounds.
- ε You pass maroon or very bloody stools.

Call your doctor now or seek immediate medical care if:

- ε You have any trouble breathing.
- ε You have new bruises or blood spots under your skin.
- ε Your stools are black and tarlike or have streaks of blood.
- ε You have signs of needing more fluids. You have sunken eyes and a dry mouth, and you pass only a little dark urine.

Watch closely for changes in your health, and be sure to contact your doctor if:

- ε You have a nosebleed.
- ε Your gums bleed when you brush your teeth.

Where can you learn more?

Go to www.southdenvergi.com, log into the web portal, and enter K781 in the search box to learn more about Hepatitis C: After Your Visit.

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