

Preventing further infection

The virus is carried round the body in the blood so infection occurs through blood to blood contact, not through hugging, kissing or sharing knives and forks or cups and glasses or any other normal social contact.

To infect someone else your blood has to get into their bloodstream so you need to take common sense precautions, such as:

- cleaning thoroughly with undiluted bleach any surface that you bleed onto
- carefully dressing any cut or graze
- not sharing anything that is inserted through your skin including earrings, piercing jewellery and, of course, needles for injecting drugs or steroids
- preventing anyone else using anything that could have come into contact with your blood such as razors, toothbrushes, even hair or nail clippers and anything you could have bled onto, such as a straw or note for snorting drugs. Also do not share pipes when smoking drugs like crack cocaine.
- never sharing anything used for injecting drugs, meaning water, spoons, filters as well as the syringes and needles themselves.

Can it be transmitted sexually?

No-one is completely sure but it seems to be extremely rare that hepatitis C is passed on during sex if there is no blood involved, but blood, even in tiny amounts, can be present, for example in anal sex or rough sex or during a woman's period. The best advice then is to use a condom unless you are in a monogamous relationship where sex will not involve blood.

For help and information

The Hepatitis C Trust

27 Crosby Row
London SE1 3YD



For support and information on any aspect of hepatitis C

Patient-staffed helpline: 0845 223 4424

10.30 to 4.30 Monday to Friday

Information website: www.hepctrust.org.uk

Email: helpline@hepctrust.org.uk

Fax : 020 7089 6201

The British Liver Trust

2 Southampton Road
Ringwood BH24 1HY



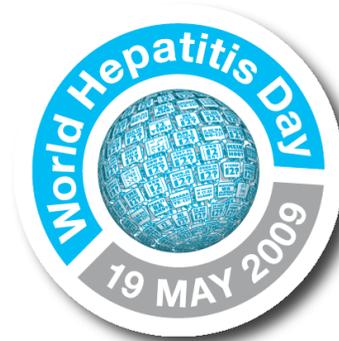
Helpline: 0800 652 7330

General enquiries: 01425 481320

Fax: 01425 481335

Email: info@britishlivertrust.org.uk

Website: www.britishlivertrust.org.uk



www.worldhepatitisday.info

Just diagnosed with hepatitis C?

If you have just been diagnosed with hepatitis C, you are not alone. Hepatitis C is much more common than people think. It is estimated that between 250,000 and 500,000 people in the UK are infected.

Hepatitis C causes liver damage but it does so over many years. So you have time to let the diagnosis sink in and find out about the options open to you, including treatment. Although it is a serious disease, it is not a death sentence and there is effective treatment available.

The liver is involved in many different functions of the body and a healthy liver is essential for good health. Many people with hepatitis C have no symptoms or their symptoms are vague. Even if you feel very unwell, this does not mean that your liver is badly damaged but equally you can feel fine even with a lot of liver damage.

The most common symptoms are:

- Periods of fatigue or continuous fatigue where sleep does not seem to solve the problem
- Muscle or joint pain
- Fever
- Pain over the liver area
- Mild nausea (feeling sick), vomiting and other digestive problems, including loss of appetite
- Difficulty in concentrating, poor memory, feeling 'woolly headed'
- Depression
- Skin problems, for example rashes and significant itching

What happens next?

You should see your GP who will have received a letter from the pharmacy and will refer you to a specialist at a hospital. The pharmacist should have already told you which strain (genotype) of the virus you have. Otherwise you will have this test at the hospital. Genotypes 1, 2 and 3 are the most common in the UK. You may also have a number of blood tests and investigations such as an ultrasound scan or liver biopsy to see if your liver has been damaged. The specialist will then talk to you about treatment options.

Treatment

The current treatment for hepatitis C is a combination of two drugs - Pegylated Interferon, which is a weekly injection, and Ribavirin, taken twice daily as a pill. It is successful in getting rid of the virus in 50 - 80% of people who take it, depending on the genotype, although most people have some side effects. Many new drugs are in development that may improve success rates but it is unclear how soon they will become available.

Who to tell?

You should contact promptly anyone you think should get tested. Otherwise you can take your time to tell people when **YOU** are ready, after you have more information and have come to terms with your diagnosis. Telling someone you have hepatitis C may provide support. However, you do not have to tell other people at all and before deciding to tell your employer you may find it useful to talk to someone else with hepatitis C.

What you can do

There is a lot you can do to help support your liver and your immune system and you may also find this helps reduce your symptoms. Almost everything you eat, drink, smoke, swallow or absorb through your skin goes through the liver so the less toxic that is, the less your liver has to cope with.

In particular, try to:

- reduce your alcohol intake as much as possible. Stop completely if you can
- drink plenty of water
- eat less fatty or fried food and avoid processed food or food which is high in chemical additives
- eat more food high in anti-oxidants such as fresh fruit and vegetables
- get enough rest and exercise
- ask for support when the disease or the symptoms get you down

Many people find that complementary medicines such as acupuncture, massage and herbs are helpful in managing their hepatitis C symptoms. It is important to go to a qualified practitioner with experience of treating hepatitis C because some complementary medicines can damage the liver.

Does it matter how you were infected?

If you can pinpoint when you may have caught the infection, this can help to calculate the length of time you have been infected. However, unless there was a particular time when you know you came into contact with infected blood, it is probably very hard to be certain when and how you were infected. More important is deciding what to do about it now and being safe so as not to infect anyone else.