

Better together

How to support your loved one who has chronic hep C





Help put a possible cure* within reach

Being there for someone with chronic hepatitis C (hep C) infection is really important. However, there are times when you may feel confused or have questions. Try to stay positive because a cure* for your loved one is possible.

This brochure provides some basic information about what hep C is and what it means for someone who has it. Use it as a guide to help you and your loved one, as you go through the hep C journey together.

*Cure of hep C virus infection means that the hep C virus cannot be detected in your blood 3 months after completing treatment.

Understanding hep C

Whether your loved one has recently gotten back his or her results, or has been living with hep C for some time, it is crucial that you learn as much as you can about hep C. This will help you to provide the best support possible for your loved one. Support may include helping your loved one determine next steps and making a treatment decision. In this section of the brochure, you'll find:

- Useful facts about hep C
- Advice on how your loved one can avoid spreading hep C
- Information on how hep C affects other health conditions

Day-to-day living

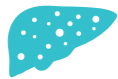
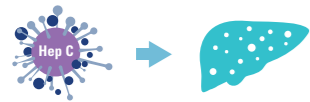
Now that you understand more about hep C, this section will provide suggestions about how you can be of help to your loved one in his or her day-to-day life. You will find tips about adopting healthy habits, preparing for visits to a health care provider and other helpful topics.

It is important that you are involved in your loved one's lifestyle changes. Your support can make a difference.

Understanding hep C

Model

The person you love is diagnosed with hep C. What is it?



Hep C is an inflammation or swelling of the liver caused by the hep C virus. The condition can be self-limiting or can progress to scarring (fibrosis), cirrhosis, or liver cancer. The hep C virus is spread through blood-to-blood contact with an infected person.



The hep C virus infection can cause liver damage slowly over time, and is one of the most common causes of liver transplants and liver cancer.



With the right treatment, hep C may be curable* even if your loved one has another health condition such as kidney problems (chronic kidney disease [CKD]), human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), cirrhosis, or substance dependence.

Are there symptoms I can look out for?



YES. Usually, hep C does not have symptoms. However, a common symptom could be fatigue. Whether your loved one has symptoms or not, the hep C virus may still be damaging his or her liver.

Here are some symptoms to watch for:

- Fever
- Feeling tired
- Lack of appetite
- Upset stomach
- Yellowing of the skin
- Weight loss
- Itchy skin
- Bleeding/bruising easily
- Hair loss
- Swelling in the legs and/or abdomen
- Pain around the liver area
- Tiny red lines visible on the skin

Remember, it is important to encourage your loved one to talk to a health care provider about treatment options.

Hep C cure* may be possible with current treatment options

- In the past, chronic hep C treatments may have taken many months, and these treatments often caused significant side effects
- Today, there are treatment options that have a shorter treatment duration and fewer side effects than treatments in the past. Treatments today are often a once-daily pill

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What you should know to prevent hep C from spreading



To help keep your loved one from spreading hep C, make sure he or she:

- Doesn't share needles (**eg, blood sugar meters**)
- Uses new, clean injecting equipment every time, if he or she injects drugs
- Doesn't share personal items (**eg, razors, toothbrushes**)
- Tells health care providers that he or she has hep C (**eg, doctors, dentists, nurses, and physicians**)
- Avoids unprotected sex
- Knows that it is possible to get hep C again, even if he or she was previously cured.* So it is very important to avoid risky behaviors



It is also important that you consider getting yourself tested for hep C.

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Did you know?



If you understand the facts about hep C, then you may be able to have a better discussion about your loved one's condition. Here are some facts to assist you:

- There is no vaccine for hep C. There are, however, vaccines for both hepatitis A and B, which are different viruses. Discuss with health care providers to see if hepatitis A and B vaccines are right for your loved one who has chronic hep C
- Hep C is spread when the blood from someone who has the virus enters the body of someone who does not have it
- It is possible for a woman to pass the hep C virus on to her child during childbirth. To learn more, speak with a health care provider
- If your loved one has the hep C virus and has unprotected sex, it is possible to pass it to his or her partner
- Hep C cannot be spread by sharing eating utensils or hugging, kissing, or shaking hands with your loved one

How hep C may affect other health conditions

Managing another health condition such as chronic kidney disease (CKD), human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), cirrhosis, or substance dependence while dealing with a hep C diagnosis can be challenging.

CKD and Hep C

People with CKD are more likely to have hep C

- Adults with hep C and CKD have more than twice the risk of advancing to kidney failure compared to adults without hep C.
- Like chronic hep C, CKD can cause damage slowly over time and often without symptoms.

HIV and Hep C

People with HIV infection are often also infected with hep C and are at risk for liver damage and disease

- Worldwide, about 2.3 million people who have HIV are also infected with hep C.
- Having HIV makes a person 6 times more likely to also have hep C.
- Having HIV in addition to hep C may worsen liver damage.

Cirrhosis and Hep C

Hep C infection can cause serious damage to your loved one's liver over time, also known as cirrhosis

- 15% to 30% of people with hep C develop cirrhosis within 20 years, and a proportion of these will progress to liver cancer.
- Chronic hep C is one of the most common causes of liver transplants and liver cancer.

Hep C and Substance Dependence

If your loved one is dealing with substance dependence, he or she may be at risk for hep C and other blood-borne viruses such as the hepatitis B virus and HIV

- Globally, 67% of people who inject drugs are infected with hepatitis C.
- If your loved one injects drugs, he or she is at risk for hep C through sharing of needles and drug preparation equipment. Your loved one can reduce the risk by not sharing needles or equipment with anyone else.



You can help support your loved one by encouraging him or her to speak with a health care provider about finding the best hep C treatment option, even if he or she has other health conditions.



Day-to-day living

Being there for your loved one is important—so is taking care of yourself

The support that you give to your loved one may change throughout the hep C journey. By keeping yourself strong and your spirits up, you will help to do the same for your loved one during each step of the journey.

Here are some tips for taking care of yourself:



Keep active

Spend time with family or friends, or step outside for some fresh air. It's amazing how much even a short break from your daily routine can be refreshing.



Ask for help if you need it

When you feel that you just can't cope, ask for help. Everyone needs a break, including you!



Treat yourself

Make the most of your free time. Read a good book, watch your favorite movie, or get a massage. It's important to treat yourself once in a while.



Don't get down on yourself

It's okay to feel a little down now and then. Remind yourself that you're doing a great job—and the person you're caring for is, too! If you continue to feel down, talk to a health care provider.

Supporting your loved one in practical ways



Here are some tips to help with visits to the health care provider:

- Help him or her keep a schedule of health care appointments
- Write down any questions you or your loved one may have before appointments (see pages 18-19 of this brochure for a helpful list of suggested questions)
- Bring a list of medicines, vitamins, and supplements to each appointment. The list should include prescribed and over-the-counter medicines. Don't forget to add medicines you may not commonly include, such as antacids, vitamins, and allergy medicines (see page 19 of this brochure for examples of antacids, vitamins, and allergy medicines)
- Keep in contact with members of the health care team
- Emphasize the importance of a healthy lifestyle, including staying active on a regular basis and following the right diet



If your loved one is already on hep C treatment:

- Encourage he or she to take his or her medicine every day
- Help your loved one set reminders to take the hep C medicine
- Make sure your loved one takes the hep C medicine for the full period of time as recommended by the health care provider
- Ensure that the hep C medicine is stored properly

Staying positive

Help your loved one celebrate the milestones—big and small. Finishing the first month of treatment, learning how to make a delicious healthy meal, or enjoying a good walk outdoors are all examples of milestones to celebrate. Like everything in life, there may be highs and lows, but stay focused on the goal—to cure* your loved one's hep C.

Helping your loved one overcome judgment about having hep C

Since there is often a stigma associated with hep C, when people find out that someone close to them has hep C, the reaction is frequently "why didn't you tell me sooner?" Or it may be something else entirely, like anger, fear, or mistrust. You may have reacted in a similar way when you were told. It may have taken your loved one a long time to tell you due to the stigma associated with hep C. Now, it is important to focus on how you can move forward together.

Since you know the facts about hep C, you may also want to encourage your loved one to consider telling others, to help put them at ease.

Some of these people may include:

- A spouse or partner
- Family
- Health care providers (eg, doctors, dentists, nurses, and physicians)
- Sexual partners
- Anyone they may have shared needles with

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Some healthy tips for you and your loved one

From the moment your loved one is diagnosed with hep C to even after he or she is cured,* one of the most positive things you can do is to develop healthy living habits.



Staying active is more fun together

With a little creative thinking you can figure out different ways to keep you and your loved one physically active—without having to go to a gymnasium. Even a small change to daily routines can be an important first step that you both can enjoy taking.

- Step off of transportation a stop earlier than usual and walk the rest of the way
- Encourage your loved one to stand up at work and walk at a normal pace for 2 to 5 minutes each hour
- Choose to park farther away from the market
- Try brisk walking and housework

You can also try things like gardening, taking longer walks, or biking. Whatever you do, staying active is a good routine.

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Start a healthier diet

If you eat well, hopefully your loved one will follow your lead and eat well too. Make smarter food and drink choices a regular practice—this may include showing your loved one what healthy means, and how to prepare healthy meals together. Here are some suggestions:

- Use leaner cuts of meat like turkey, chicken, and fish instead of fatty meats
- Try low-fat or fat-free yogurt instead of full-fat yogurt
- Replace cola or carbonated soda with 100% fruit juice mixed with soda water
- Choose semi-skimmed or skimmed milk
- Avoid processed* and fried foods
- Choose fruits and vegetables instead of snacks and drinks full of extra sugar (such as candy and soda)
- Avoid foods with trans fats,[†] which are often found in processed foods and prepackaged snack foods
- Eat only small amounts of processed meats, which are high in trans fats and salt

*A processed food is one that has been changed from its original form. During this change, salt, sugar, and fat are often added.

[†]Trans fats are fats that go through a chemical process that makes the oil solid or hard. This is also known as hydrogenated fat.

How can I help my loved one prevent reinfection if he or she is cured* of hep C?

Even if your loved one is cured,* it is still possible to be reinfected with the hep C virus if he or she is in contact with blood that is infected with the hep C virus. The risk of reinfection may be higher if one injects drugs or is a human immunodeficiency virus (HIV)–positive man who has sex with other men (MSM).

Remember, you can help prevent reinfection by reminding your loved one to not share needles, blood sugar meters, or personal care items, and to avoid unprotected sex.



By working together, you and your loved one have the best chance of reaching his or her goal of cure.*

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Together
we can do it

Questions to ask his or her health care provider



Your loved one's health care provider is his or her best source for information about chronic hepatitis C (hep C) infection. To help get the conversation started, use the questions listed below.

Take these questions with you to the next appointment.

1. How might hep C have an effect on his or her day-to-day life?
2. What types of blood tests will your loved one need and how often?
3. Should we manage my loved one's hep C differently if he or she has other health conditions (**eg, diabetes, kidney problems, substance dependence, high blood pressure**)?
4. How often will my loved one have to come in for appointments?

5. How can he or she prevent spreading hep C to others?
6. Are there effective treatments? Are they safe?
7. Does my loved one need to stop taking prescribed medications (**eg, diabetes medications, oral contraceptives, blood pressure medications, or cholesterol medications**) while on chronic hep C treatment?
8. Will my loved one's over-the-counter pills (**eg, antacids, vitamins, or allergy medicines**) interact with his or her chronic hep C treatment?



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9. Is it possible to cure* my loved one's hep C?

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Resources

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Advocacy and support groups

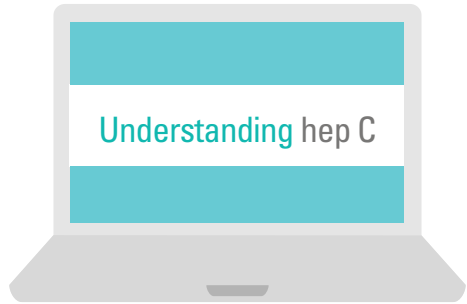
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Find out more about hep C online

- Extra health tips
- Advice on talking about hep C
- Fun interactive quiz
- And more...





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