



Hepatitis C and your liver health

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Contents

Why is my liver health important?	6
How might hepatitis C affect my liver health?	7
How might I have caught hepatitis C?	8
How will I know if I have hepatitis C?	10
Can I get treated if I test positive for hepatitis C?	12
What next?	17
I'm ready to talk to my healthcare provider	18
References	19

Why is my liver health important?



A healthy liver, a healthy you

The liver is one of the largest organs in the human body. The liver helps your body to 'clean' your blood, removing waste from what you eat and drink. It also helps you process food and absorb nutrients, so keeping your liver healthy is essential to your overall wellbeing.¹

Looking after your liver

A healthy liver can help you feel your best.

Here are some things that may harm your liver:

- ! Drinking a lot of alcohol²
- ! Using drugs recreationally³
- ! Eating an unhealthy diet, or being overweight²
- ! All forms of viral hepatitis, including the common forms hepatitis A, B, C and D²



Hepatitis is the term used to describe inflammation of the liver. Most people recover from hepatitis A with no lasting liver damage, but hepatitis B, C and D can cause long term liver disease and liver cancer.²

How might hepatitis C affect my liver health?

Hepatitis C

Hepatitis C is a virus that attacks the liver.⁴

The hepatitis C virus lives in infected blood and is spread when someone comes into contact with blood from an infected person.^{4,5}

BUT, you might not realise you have hepatitis C straight away because there are no symptoms for most people at the beginning – the virus can take a long time to affect the liver and cause symptoms.⁶

The only way to know for certain if these symptoms are caused by hepatitis C is to get tested.

Hepatitis C can harm your liver

Hepatitis C can damage your liver and make you feel unwell in the long term. People report stomach problems, muscle aches and a foggy head or fever. These symptoms are very general and can feel like flu or IBS, so they can go unnoticed or misdiagnosed for many years.

If you have had hep C for 20 years, these are the stages your liver could undergo.



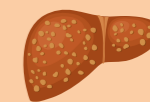
Healthy liver



Liver inflammation



Fibrotic liver



Cirrhotic liver

If hepatitis C isn't treated it can cause your liver to become inflamed and lead to scarring of the liver. A liver with too much scar tissue can't work properly.

How might I have caught hepatitis C?

Think carefully— you could have hepatitis C if you have ever:

- Injected drugs⁵
- Had a blood transfusion abroad, or in the UK before 1991⁵
- Had a tattoo or piercing with an unsterilised needle⁵
- Had unprotected or rough sex with someone who has hepatitis C, including MSM community⁵
- Been exposed to any unsterilised medical or dental equipment abroad⁵

If your mother had hepatitis C when you were born, there is a very small chance it could have been passed to you.⁵

Don't pick it up, don't pass it on

Successfully treating hepatitis C means that you cannot pass it on to other people anymore.⁷ But even after you have been treated, you can catch hepatitis C again.⁷ To reduce the risk of catching hepatitis C or passing it on, avoid:

- Sharing needles, syringes and other items used to take drugs⁵
- Having unprotected sex especially with men who have sex with men⁵
- Sharing your razor or toothbrush⁵

How will I know if I have hepatitis C?

The background of the entire page is a stylized illustration. At the top, there are large, dark red, cloud-like shapes with blue and white leaves falling from them. Below this, the background is a light orange color. On the left side, there is a silhouette of a person wearing a yellow jacket and a red hat, holding a blue bag. In the center, there is a silhouette of a person walking a dog on a leash. On the right side, there are large, dark red, cloud-like shapes. The bottom of the page features a silhouette of a city skyline on the left and a silhouette of a person walking a dog on the right. The overall color palette is warm, with shades of orange, red, and brown.

Get tested

If you have had hepatitis C before, or think you might have contracted it, it is important to get tested.

Testing can be done in many different places such as GP surgeries, hospitals, sexual health clinics, drug and alcohol services, pharmacies or at home (using a self test). There are also mobile testing services if that is easier for you⁸, and you can even order a test online via the NHS testing portal: <https://heptest.nhs.uk/>

Hepatitis C is usually diagnosed using 2 tests which can be done in the same testing visit. These tests are called the antibody test and the PCR test.⁹

The antibody test

You need an antibody test to find out if you have ever had to fight off a hep C infection before. A positive test means you've come into contact with hepatitis C. You'll then need another test (a PCR test) to find out if the hepatitis virus is active.⁹

The PCR test

The PCR test checks if the virus is still active in your body. The test results come back within a few weeks.

Your support provider can talk to you and take you through everything you need to know.

Can I get treated if I test positive for hepatitis C?

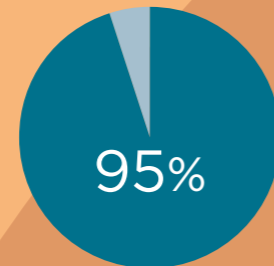
- Up to 12 weeks of treatment¹⁰
- Treatment is given as a pill-based medication¹⁰
- Most treatment has few side effects¹⁰



Hepatitis C can be treated!

Good news: these days, most people with hep C **can be treated**.

Treatment can be taken over 8–12 weeks with medicine taken as a pill.^{7,10}



95% of patients with hepatitis C may be cured¹¹

Your healthcare provider will talk to you about what treatments are suitable for you. It is important to tell them about anything else you are taking (including medicines, herbal remedies or street drugs).²

Getting treatment is simple

No injections are needed. Treatment generally involves taking tablets for up to 12 weeks.¹⁰

You will normally have a blood test twice during treatment to check it is working, with a follow up three months after treatment to make sure you are clear.¹⁰

You may experience some side effects from your treatment. Different people experience different side effects, but you may feel a little sick and have trouble sleeping to begin with.¹⁰ This is normal and should settle down quickly.¹⁰

Your healthcare team will tell you what to expect, and can suggest ways to ease any discomfort. If you notice any side effects at all, let your healthcare provider know straight away.



There are things you can do to help you feel better during treatment:

- Eat as well as you can¹⁰
- Exercise regularly¹⁰
- Avoid or drink less alcohol¹⁰
- Smoke less, or quit if you can¹⁰

Your healthcare team can offer you support and advice with all of this — from eating right and getting active, through to helping you quit smoking or drinking. Don't be afraid to ask.

If you are going to take drugs or drink alcohol during your treatment, speak to your healthcare provider.

Three months after you have finished your treatment, your healthcare provider will ask you to take another blood test to confirm that you have cleared the virus.¹⁰

Research in groups of people who inject drugs has shown that treatment of hep C can have a positive effect on things like:¹²

- Self-esteem
- Mental health
- Tiredness and energy levels
- Getting a new job

Get tested, get treated, get cured

Hepatitis C is a virus that can infect the liver. If left untreated, it can sometimes cause serious and potentially life-threatening damage to the liver over many years.⁷ Avoid passing hepatitis C onto others.⁷



What next?

Take care: you can catch hepatitis C again.

Completing treatment is a great step towards having a healthier liver and a happier life.

But remember, if you take part in risky behaviour you can become infected again.

See the 'Don't pick it up, don't pass it on' section on page 9 for tips to avoid contracting hepatitis C again.



Further support, if you need it

If you would like any support or you have any queries or questions you can contact The Hepatitis C Trust confidentially:
020 7089 6221 helpline@hepctrust.org.uk

I'm ready to talk to my healthcare provider

Your healthcare team is here to help you. Speaking openly with them regularly with any questions or concerns means they can help you in the best way possible.

If you think you could have hep C these questions will help you get the most from a chat with your healthcare team

- How do I know if I have hepatitis C?
- Where and how can I get tested?
- Where do I go for advice?
- If I have the virus, how do I make sure I don't pass it onto others?
- How could my other health conditions affect my hepatitis C treatment?

When getting tested

- What do my test results mean?
- How long will it take to get the results?
- What do I need to do now?
- Where can I learn more about hepatitis C?

If you are diagnosed with hepatitis C

- What does this mean for me?
- What can I do to get better and improve my liver health?
- When do I need to start treatment?
- How could my other health conditions affect my hepatitis C treatment?
- Where can I get support and advice on dealing with my hepatitis C diagnosis?

When starting treatment

- How do I take the treatment?
- What should I be aware of during treatment?
- How often do I need to see my healthcare team, and will they arrange the appointments for me?

After treatment

- How can I avoid getting hepatitis C again?
- What support services are available to me and how do I get in touch with them?

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