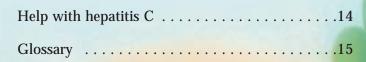


# Table of Contents Hepatitis C: a part of life for many people . . . . . . 4

What is hepatitis C?
What does my liver do?
How could hepatitis C affect my liver? $\dots \dots 10$
What are the symptoms of hepatitis C?
How are people infected with hepatitis C?12



How can I avoid spreading hepatitis C? ......13



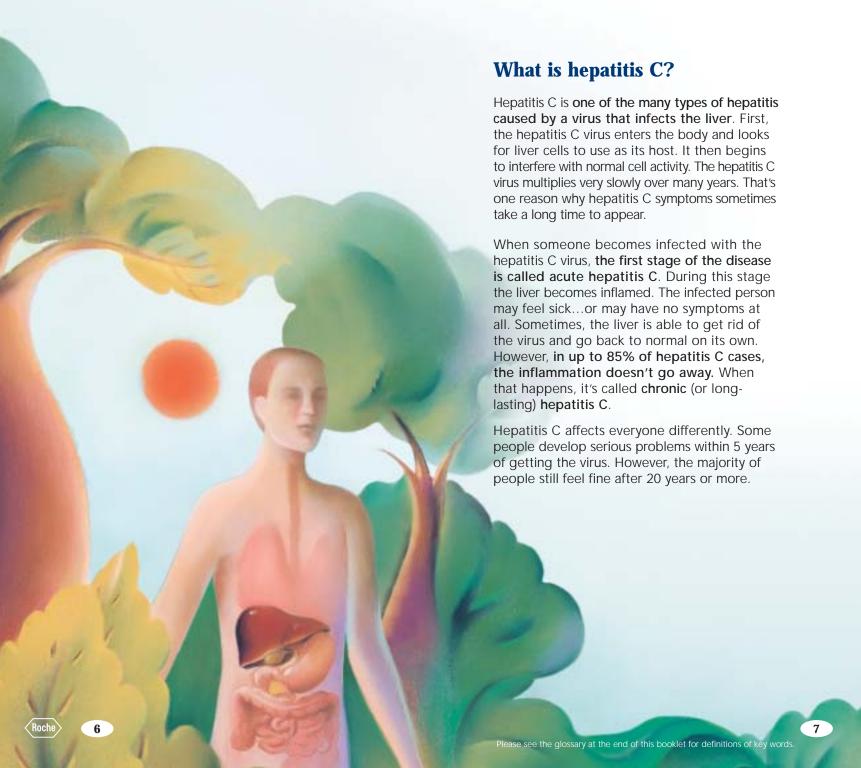
## **Hepatitis C: a part of life for many people**

Hepatitis is inflammation of the liver, which is often caused by a virus. While there are several types of hepatitis, hepatitis C is actually the most common.

- According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), an estimated 3.9 million Americans are infected with hepatitis C, most of whom are chronically infected
- Hepatitis C is the most common blood-borne infection in the United States

If you or someone you know has hepatitis C, you'll want to learn as much as you can about the virus. This booklet is a good starting point. But, remember, your doctor is your best source for information on your condition and its treatment.

Since you may not know all of the medical words in this booklet, we've included a glossary with definitions at the back.



## What does my liver do?

The liver is a very important organ that's also part of the digestive system. It helps remove toxins and waste products from your blood. In fact, almost everything that enters your body, plus a large amount of the chemicals that are made by other organs, goes through the liver at some point. Your liver is responsible for so many things, that any damage to it can cause problems in other parts of your body. That's why hepatitis C is such a serious concern.

### Here's what your liver does:

- Stores vitamins, minerals, iron and sugars
- Produces protein, bile and blood-clotting agents
- Regulates cholesterol and chemicals/drugs in the blood
- Keeps hormones at the correct level
- Acts as a filter to cleanse blood and discharge waste products into bile

To help keep your liver healthy, it's important to eat well and avoid alcohol and recreational drugs. If you have hepatitis C, this is even more critical!

## How could hepatitis C affect my liver?

Remember, hepatitis C mainly affects the liver. Sometimes, years—even decades—may go by before someone's liver is damaged and that person feels ill. To check your liver health, your doctor may do a liver biopsy. During a biopsy, a tiny sample of the liver is removed and examined by a laboratory. The results of the biopsy can help your doctor decide how to treat your hepatitis C.

Liver damage can cause problems with blood passing through the organ. This can make liver cells die. It's then harder for the liver to store nutrients and to take toxins out of the body. The longer you have untreated hepatitis C, the greater your risk may be of developing other liver health problems.

For example, if liver damage caused by the virus is left untreated, it can sometimes lead to cirrhosis—a serious condition where normal liver cells are replaced by scar tissue. A liver with scar tissue cannot heal itself, even if the inflammation goes away. Cirrhosis typically occurs in about 20% of people infected with hepatitis C.

## What are the symptoms of hepatitis C?

As with any illness, people experience hepatitis C symptoms in different ways. Some will have several symptoms, but others will feel just fine. Symptoms can seem to come and go, or be longer lasting. Liver damage can occur whether or not there are symptoms. And it's also possible to have severe symptoms but no liver damage at all.

It's important to point out that very few people with hepatitis C have all of the symptoms listed below. Also, just because you may have one or more of these symptoms doesn't mean you have the virus. The only way to know for sure whether or not you have hepatitis C is to take a blood test. To find out more about blood tests, please talk with your doctor.

### Here are some symptoms to watch for:

- Aches: Flu-like illness; joint pain; general weakness or feeling tired
- Nutrition: Loss of appetite; blood-sugar disorders
- Gastrointestinal: Indigestion; diarrhea
- Psychological: Depression; mood swings; mental fatigue
- Sleep: Irregular or poor sleep quality, not feeling rested after sleep

## How are people infected with hepatitis C?

Hepatitis C is a disease caused by a blood-borne virus that is passed from person to person when infected blood comes in contact with noninfected blood. It is also possible to contract hepatitis C from infected body fluids, although transmission through body fluids is less likely. About 10% of people with hepatitis C don't know how they got the virus. The best way to prevent hepatitis C is to learn the risk factors—and to avoid any unsafe activities.

## Some ways people can come in contact with hepatitis C-infected blood or body fluids:

- Blood transfusions (before July 1992), operations and infected blood products
- Intravenous drug use (past or present even one-time use)
- · Tattooing or body piercing
- Occupational, eg, needlestick and dental treatment
- Needles, dialysis equipment and other medical equipment
- Transmission from mother to child during birth
- Shared personal hygiene items (such as razors, toothbrushes, nail files)
- Intramucosally (that is, through the tissues lining body openings) when taking cocaine and other drugs
- Sexual activity that involves contact with infected blood or body fluids
- Acupuncture

## How can I avoid spreading hepatitis C?

If you have or suspect that you have hepatitis C, it's very important that you protect others who may come in contact with your blood or body fluids. The good news is that if you take some simple steps, you can reduce the chance of infecting others.

## What you can do to avoid passing hepatitis C on to others:

- Advise anyone (such as sexual partners, doctors or dentists) who could come in contact with your blood or body fluids if you suspect or know that you have hepatitis C
- Don't share any personal hygiene items (razors, nail files and toothbrushes)
- Carefully dispose of items that may contain your blood or body fluids (tissues, swabs and tampons)
- Use disinfectants and bandages to cover cuts and wounds
- Avoid sexual practices that may cause contact with blood
- Do not donate blood, organs, bone marrow, eggs or semen

## Help with hepatitis C

If you suspect you may have hepatitis C or you've already been diagnosed, it's important to take care of yourself. Your doctor can answer your questions, help with symptoms that may be bothering you and help you decide if and which medication is right for you. Your doctor is an important partner in your fight against hepatitis C.

## Glossary

Acute hepatitis: The first stage of the disease following infection. During this stage, a person may or may not have symptoms, and the disease may or may not go away on its own

Blood-borne virus: A virus that circulates in the blood and can be transmitted from one person to another during blood-to-blood contact (eg, through shared needles)

**Chronic hepatitis:** Persistent inflammation of the liver, which may lead to other liver problems

Cirrhosis [sih-ROE-sis]: A condition in which normal liver cells die and are replaced by scar tissue

Host cell: A cell infected by a virus

**Infection**: Contamination by a disease-producing agent (eg, a virus)

Liver biopsy [BYE-op-see]: Extracting a tiny sample of the liver with a needle to be examined by a laboratory

**Liver inflammation:** A biological response to cellular injury that may affect liver function

Virus: A tiny infectious agent that causes disease



### **Hepatitis C information resources**

#### American Liver Foundation

75 Maiden Lane, Suite 603 New York, NY 10038 (800) GO-LIVER (465-4837) (888) 4-HEP-ABC (443-7222) http://www.liverfoundation.org

#### Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

1600 Clifton Road Atlanta, GA 30333 (888) 4-HEP-CDC (443-7232) http://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis

### Hepatitis Foundation International

504 Blick Drive Silver Spring, MD 20904-2901 (800) 891-0707 (301) 622-4200 http://www.hepfi.org

#### Hep C Connection

1177 Grant Street, Suite 200 Denver, CO 80203 (800) 522-HEPC (4372) (303) 860-0800 http://www.hepc-connection.org

#### HIV and Hepatitis.com

P.O.Box 14288 San Francisco, CA 94114 http://www.hivandhepatitis.com

### National AIDS Treatment Advocacy Project (NATAP)

580 Broadway, Suite 1010 New York, NY 10012 (888) 26-NATAP (62827) (212) 219-0106 http://www.natap.org

#### National Hepatitis C Coalition, Inc.

P.O. Box 5058 Hemet, CA 92544 National Hepline: (909) 658-4414 http://www.nationalhepatitis-c.org

Please note that Hoffmann-La Roche Inc is providing these names solely as information sources, not as endorsements.



#### **Pharmaceuticals**