

Health Maintenance in Chronic Hepatitis

I was told that I have chronic hepatitis. Other than take medicines, is there anything I can do to make myself be healthier and live longer?

Hepatitis B and C are viruses that can cause infections in humans. They usually infect the liver and cause inflammation. Inflammation is when the body produces cells to fight an infection. This inflammation can cause swelling of the liver and long-term can cause cirrhosis or scarring of the liver.

Vaccines:

If you have chronic hepatitis, you should receive an **influenza** vaccine (“flu shot”) every year. You should receive a shot for pneumonia called the **Pneumovax** at least once; some people recommend this every five years if you have chronic hepatitis. If you are not immune to **hepatitis A**, you should get vaccinated for this disease because hepatitis A can cause a lot of damage to your liver if you already have chronic hepatitis B or C. If you have chronic hepatitis C, you should also receive vaccinations for **hepatitis B** if you are not immune. There is no vaccine to prevent hepatitis C.

Diet:

A healthy, balanced diet is the best diet if you have chronic liver disease. Some experts recommend watching your protein intake. You have to be careful with **raw seafood**, such as raw oysters, especially from the ocean. Bacteria can live in the seafood and make you very ill if you eat them. You should also wear gloves when handling raw seafood. A multivitamin without iron daily is a good idea. The most important thing though is to **limit alcohol**; when you drink alcohol and have chronic hepatitis, your chance of developing cirrhosis goes up a lot and it develops faster. Most experts recommend avoidance of alcohol as much as possible.

Medications:

Many medications go through the liver and are broken down by the liver. Most medications are safe in patients with chronic hepatitis; **acetaminophen**, found in Tylenol, is one that should be limited to less than 2000 mg (about 4 extra-strength doses) within 24 hours. Too much acetaminophen can damage your liver more.

There are also some herbal medicines that can harm your liver, such as some Chinese herbal mixtures or teas. You should check with your medical provider or pharmacist before taking any herbal medications.

If you have further questions, be sure to talk to your primary care provider or health educator or nurse.