



If you
have HIV...

What are
you waiting for

**Get tested
for Hep C**

And, if you have Hep C too,
treatment is available.
Talk to your doctor today!

Provided by



Pharmaceuticals

What you need to know about Hep C

One out of three people with HIV also has hepatitis C (Hep C). If you are reading this, you may be one of them.

This booklet will answer some of your questions about Hep C, but it does not take the place of your doctor.

It will explain:

- What is Hep C
- How HIV affects Hep C
- Why a healthy liver is important
- What can happen without Hep C medication
- Why starting treatment now may be the best thing you can do to help your liver

Talk to your doctor today to find out if you have Hep C and if taking medicine for it now is the right thing to do.

What is Hep C?

Hep C is a virus that infects and damages the liver.

The first stage of the disease is called **acute Hep C**. During this stage, the liver becomes larger. Not many people get rid of Hep C without medicine.

Most people end up with **chronic Hep C**. Chronic Hep C does not get better without medication. The virus continues to grow over the years and can result in major problems like cirrhosis (scarring of the liver).

The Hep C virus tends to get worse faster in people who also have HIV. If you have HIV, your immune system is already weakened and the medicine you are taking may have begun to damage your liver. All this can make it harder for your body to fight the Hep C virus. That is why it grows faster in a person with HIV. **Your doctor can tell if you have Hep C by doing a blood test.**



Why is my liver so important to my health?

Your liver is part of your digestive system. You need it to:

- Filter toxins and waste products from your blood
- Manage cholesterol and other chemicals in your body
- Make protein, bile and the agents that clot your blood
- Help your body process your HIV medicines
- Store vitamins, minerals, iron and sugars
- Keep your hormones at the right level

You need your liver to stay alive—just as much as you need your heart to keep pumping blood.

Why is maintaining a healthy liver so important in successfully treating my HIV?

Liver disease is now a major cause of death among people with HIV. If Hep C causes enough damage to your liver, it may not be possible to start or stay on anti-HIV therapy. This is an important reason to treat Hep C before there is major liver damage. As Hep C gets worse, it causes liver damage, or cirrhosis of the liver. This can lead to other serious diseases, like liver cancer and liver failure.

How does HIV affect Hep C?

HIV can make Hep C worse. *People with HIV tend to have Hep C that gets worse, faster.* The treatments that fight HIV can also make Hep C worse. This is because anti-HIV medicines must pass through the liver. In people with both viruses, anti-HIV drugs may speed up the liver damage caused by Hep C.



Why is it important that I talk to my doctor about medication?

The longer Hep C goes untreated, the greater the risk for liver damage. And, starting therapy earlier, rather than later, may help your liver by stopping the virus from further damaging it.

What can happen if Hep C is not treated?

As Hep C gets worse, it causes liver damage, or scarring of the liver. If this damage continues, scar tissue starts to replace normal liver cells. Once a liver has scar tissue, it cannot heal itself completely. The more scar tissue there is, the harder it is for the liver to do its many jobs. For you, this may include processing your HIV medications.

What should I ask my doctor about Hep C medication?

Hep C medication is available for people with HIV. If you have chronic Hep C, first ask your doctor about medication and then ask if there is any medical reason why you cannot try it.

Hep C treatment can help you, but it can also have side effects. If your Hep C treatment works, you will be better able to fight HIV. You may be able to prevent major liver damage that could shorten your life. It is also important to know about the possible side effects that can happen with Hep C medications, so talk to your doctor today.

If you have Hep C . . . the time to treat may be now

You may be upset to learn you have two viral diseases. However, Hep C is treatable because there are medications available for people with both HIV and Hep C.

Your doctor and/or nurse will be there to support you. If you want the best results, follow their instructions. And, if you need help, just ask them.

This booklet is designed to provide general information to patients. You should always seek the advice of your doctor if you have any condition that may require medical treatment.



