

The TV Series

HEALTHY BODY HEALTHY MIND

www.HealthyBodyHealthyMind.com

Produced By:



INFORMATION
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UNDERSTANDING HEPATITIS

Hepatitis means “inflammation of the liver”, and the most common cause is infection with one of 5 viruses, called Hepatitis A, B, C, D and E. All of these viruses can cause an acute disease with symptoms lasting a couple weeks. Some of the symptoms include: yellowing of the skin and eyes (jaundice), dark urine, extreme fatigue, nausea, vomiting, and abdominal pain.

The unfortunate target of this illness is the liver, a complex organ that serves as a one-stop shop for many of the body’s needs. It aids in digestion, makes vital proteins, stores reserves of sugar, vitamins and minerals, and helps defend the body against germs and toxins. Damage caused by alcohol, certain medications, or hepatitis, can rob the liver of these talents. But the liver is a stoic organ; it usually doesn’t complain or cause pain until it is in serious trouble.

Experts agree hepatitis poses the biggest threat when it becomes chronic – that is, when patients fail to fight off the initial infection and when the virus settles into the liver for a long-term assault. Patients don’t develop antibodies which allow them to clear the virus from their blood and the virus stays in their blood indefinitely. It’s a constant struggle between the virus trying to replicate and the body trying to eradicate the virus. That sets up chronic infection, chronic inflammation, and scar tissue and in some people that can lead to cirrhosis over time. Once cirrhosis develops, a person is at risk for liver failure or the development of liver tumors or liver cancers.

When chronic hepatitis leads to liver failure or liver cancer, the consequences can be devastating. But every individual has two chances to prevent this outcome. First, take precautions to avoid exposure to the hepatitis B and C viruses. Second, those who may have been exposed already should be tested sooner rather than later. People who carry hepatitis B or C get a second chance to protect their liver through careful monitoring and appropriate treatment.

Surprisingly, hepatitis is one of the nation’s most common chronic infections. Nearly four million Americans have a chronic infection that slowly and quietly assaults the liver; an infection that can go decades without detection, often causing permanent damage before patients even suspect something is wrong.

Cause/Risk factors

There are several types of viruses that cause hepatitis and they range from relatively harmless to potentially lethal.

■ **Viral Hepatitis A (HAV)** typically spreads by eating food or drinking water contaminated with human feces. Feces-contaminated water and food are the major sources of infection, and infected people can transmit it to others if they do not take strict sanitary precautions. Among the people at risk for passing the infection along or being infected are the following: international travelers, day care employees and children, sexually active homosexual men, intravenous drug users, health care workers, food industry workers, and sewage workers.

■ **Viral Hepatitis B (HBV)** spreads in the same way as HIV, it can be transmitted sexually or through needle sharing among injection drug users, or from mother to baby. It’s not a rare virus, in fact a third of the world’s population has been exposed and 400 million people are chronically infected, mainly in Sub-Saharan Africa and parts of Asia. Hospital workers, staff members of institutions for mentally impaired people, prisoners, and international travelers are also at high risk.

UNDERSTANDING HEPATITIS (CONT'D)

People at the highest risk for becoming chronic carriers of the virus include: children infected before they are five, including newborns, and infected people with damaged immune systems, such as AIDS patients.

■ **Viral Hepatitis C (HCV)** is the most common of viral forms, typically spread through blood transfusions, needles, sexual contact, or working in a medical environment. African Americans are twice as likely as whites to be infected, and men are at greater risk than women. It is currently not possible to predict which patients will develop the chronic form of hepatitis C.

■ **Viral Hepatitis D (HDV)** spreads only in the presence of hepatitis B and transmitted in the same ways. It is not common in the US and the incidence of this hepatitis is declining rapidly overseas. Experts anticipate that it will be extremely rare in the near future. Those who recover from hepatitis B are immune to further infection from both hepatitis B and D viruses.

■ **Viral Hepatitis E (HEV)** is most commonly found in people who live in countries with poor sanitation. Hepatitis E occurs primarily in adults. The highest rates of symptomatic disease (jaundice) have been reported in young to middle-aged adults. Chronic infection does not occur.

Treatment

There are treatments for both chronic hepatitis B and C, but they vary widely in effectiveness from one patient to the next. The goals of treating chronic hepatitis are to eradicate the virus when possible, and otherwise to suppress it so that it cannot damage the liver. When successful, these therapies can prevent liver failure and liver cancer, and in some cases, reverse liver damage that has already occurred.

Treatment for hepatitis HAV differs from HBV and HCV in that it doesn't cause chronic infection or chronic liver disease. Almost all cases resolve after a few weeks. However, because its symptoms can be sudden and severe, hospitalization may be necessary for patients who become dehydrated from vomiting or who have severe hepatitis.

Acute hepatitis B usually resolves spontaneously (in 95 percent of cases) and no specific therapy is advised. However, approximately 5 percent of infected patients may not clear HBV, and go on to develop chronic infection with progressive disease and a risk of liver cancer. Three drugs have been approved for chronic HBV treatment: alpha-interferon, lamivudine, and adefovir. As a preventive measure, people should avoid alcohol if they are infected, as well as other liver toxins, such as acetaminophen.

Fifty to 85 percent of adults infected with hepatitis HCV develop a chronic or life-long infection. Doctors measure the level of HCV virus in blood and genotype of HCV to plan treatment. Research shows that a combination therapy of ribavirin and interferon is the most effective treatment. In addition to antiviral therapy, it is recommended that HCV patients not drink alcohol in excess. They should also get vaccinated against other types of hepatitis, and see a doctor regularly.

In Brief

While new cases of hepatitis B and C are declining in the U.S., deaths are expected to increase as patients who contracted the infections years ago develop liver failure or liver cancer. Doctors say the best hope for fighting this trend is to identify and treat more people with chronic hepatitis before they develop severe liver damage.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q Is there a cure for hepatitis B, or a vaccine for HCV?

A No, there isn't a cure for hepatitis B; which is why prevention is so important. Hepatitis B vaccine is the best protection against HBV. And, there is no vaccine for HCV.

Q Who should receive hepatitis B vaccine?

A Babies, at birth; healthcare workers; laboratory workers who may have contact with bodily fluids; hemodialysis patients; homosexuals; intravenous drug users; and any persons of any age or gender whose behavior puts them at high risk for HBV infection.

Q What are some other things you can do to protect yourself from hepatitis B?

A Use a condom when you have sex; don't share drug needles with anyone; wear gloves if you have to touch anyone's blood; don't use an infected person's toothbrush, razor, or anything else that could have blood on it. Also, if you get a tattoo or body piercing, make sure it is done with clean tools.

Q What other things can a person do to prevent HAV?

A Always wash your hands after using the toilet and before fixing food or eating. Wear gloves if you have to touch other people's stool. Wash your hands afterwards. Drink bottled water when you are in another country. (Don't use ice cubes or wash foods in tap water.)

Q Who get vaccinated for HAV?

A Hepatitis A vaccine has been licensed in the United States for use in persons 2 years of age and older. The vaccine is recommended (before exposure to hepatitis A virus) for persons who are more likely to get hepatitis A virus.

Q What kinds of tests help detect hepatitis B?

A To check for hepatitis B, a doctor will test a patient's blood. These tests will determine if hepatitis B is present and how serious it is. The doctor may also do a liver biopsy to check for signs of HBV and liver damage.

Q What are the chances of persons with HCV infection developing long term infection, chronic liver disease, cirrhosis, liver cancer, or dying as a result of hepatitis C?

A Of every 100 persons infected with HCV about: 85 persons may develop long-term infection, 70 persons may develop chronic liver disease, 15 persons may develop cirrhosis, and 5 persons may die from the consequences of long term infection (liver cancer or cirrhosis).

Q What is the top reason for liver transplants in the U.S?

A Chronic hepatitis is the leading cause of liver cancer worldwide, and the top reason for liver transplants in the U.S. There are treatments, but unfortunately not for all patients.

Q Is it true that some patient's die waiting for a liver transplant?

A Yes. In the United States alone, 5 to 6 thousand transplants are performed each year. Currently, there are 18,000 people on the transplant list.

DATA, RESOURCES, HOTLINES, PUBLICATIONS and MEDIA CONTACTS

Hepatitis Resource Network

400 E. Pioneer Ave, Suite 102
Puyallup, WA 98372
(P) 866-HEP-NTWK
www.h-r-n.org

Hepatitis B Foundation

700 East Butler Avenue
Doylestown, PA 18901-2697
(P) 215-489-4900
www.hepb.org

Hepatitis C Association Inc.

1351 Cooper Road
Scotch Plains, NJ 07076-2844
(P) 866-437-4377
hepcassoc.org

American Social Health Association

P.O. Box 13827
Research Triangle Park, NC 27709
(P) 919-361-8400
www.ashastd.org

American Public Health Association

800 I Street, NW
Washington, DC 20001
(P) 202- 777-2742
www.apha.org

American Liver Foundation

75 Maiden Lane
Suite 603
New York, NY 10038
(P) 800-GO-Liver
www.liverfoundation.org

American Association for the Study of Liver Diseases

1729 King Street, Suite 200
Alexandria, Virginia 22314
(P) 703-299-9766
www.aasld.org

National Institutes of Health (NIH)

9000 Rockville Pike
Bethesda, Maryland 20892
(P) 301-496-4000
www.nih.gov

Division of Viral Hepatitis

National Center for Infectious Diseases
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
US Department of Health and Human Services
(P) 888-4-HEP-CDC
www.cdc.gov

Online Resources and Hepatitis Video

For more resources on the world-wide-web, or to view a 30 minute documentary style program on Hepatitis, visit Healthy Body, Healthy Mind at:

www.healthybodyhealthymind.com

