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# Living With Hepatitis C

Living with hepatitis C can be a difficult and frustrating experience. Constant fatigue and low-level illness is common, and the symptoms can increase the emotional toll of dealing with long-term disease. Available treatments are painful, uncomfortable, and often worse than the symptoms of the disease itself. However, because of the long course of the infection, infected patients have long life expectancies, and with proper treatment, many of them can recover completely.

Coping with fatigue is a common problem for infected individuals. Finding a happy balance between relaxation and activities is helpful. Frequently, short naps between activities or outings prevent overwhelming fatigue at the end of the day, and limiting tiring activities on a day-by-day basis seems to help people find time to regroup.

Many things can worsen damage to the liver. It is important to avoid increasing the stress on an already overworked and damaged liver. Alcohol, in particular, must be avoided. Studies have shown that alcohol massively increases damage to the liver in hepatitis C victims. Other dangerous substances include many toxins, such as copper, many over-the-counter and prescription drugs, including aspirin, and vitamins, including Vitamin A.

Many infected individuals find that the hardest thing about hepatitis C is the social stigma associated with the disease, and others' fears of becoming infected as a result of contact. Traditionally, hepatitis has been regarded as a disease of the poor and a disease of alcoholics, and



Several prescription treatments for hepatitis C are available



Many vitamins and common pharmaceuticals are toxic unless rendered harmless by the liver

these prejudices have outlived the progression of hepatitis into the population at large.

In truth, the risk of transmission to co-workers or other household members seems to be quite low, and even sexual transmission is rare. The CDC recommends the use of sexual prophylactics by anyone infected with hepatitis C or any other sexually transmissible disease, but common contact is not dangerous. While it should be kept in mind that there is no known mode of transmission for approximately 10% of cases, this should not be taken as a statement that it can be easily casually acquired. Routine precautions around

blood, and avoiding the sharing of toothbrushes, razors, and other personal items should provide adequate protection.

### **Prospects for treatment**

There is no vaccine for hepatitis C at present, and it may be a long time before one becomes available. The great variation in genotypes with hepatitis C, as well as its frequent mutation, makes the development of treatments and vaccines extremely difficult. Liver transplantation may be life-saving in end-stage liver disease, but is costly and involves continuing health care following the procedure. This treatment option is further complicated by a shortage of liver donors. For HCV-positive patients under going transplantation, re- infection is almost universal.

There are a number of drug treatments becoming available for hepatitis C. Infected individuals should consult with their physician to see about the availability and effectiveness of these treatments, as well as the possibility of participating in experimental drug trials.