

Managing your Health

If you have Hep C, it is important to think about your lifestyle and diet carefully. It is important that you do not share injecting equipment, tattooing equipment or razors, as this could put you at risk of being infected with another genotype of Hepatitis C, which could complicate treatment. It is also important to get vaccinated for Hepatitis B.



Eat a variety of healthy nutrient rich food from each food group. Avoiding foods which contain too much fat or salt. Reducing alcohol consumption is vital to reduce the risk of liver damage. Exercise is also very important, as it can reduce nausea and improve appetite. All of these can have a positive effect on your health.



Support and information

DIRECTIONS ACT provides a Liver Clinic and Hep C Wellness Clinic once a week, at the **Althea Wellness Centre 6122 8080**

Alternatively, you can also seek support and information from your GP, at the

**ACT Hepatitis Resource Centre
1300 301 383**

www.hepatitisresourcecentre.com.au

or the

NSW Hep C helpline 1800 803 990

DIRECTIONS ACT offers a wide range of programs for people who use drugs and their families, and the wider community:

- Arcadia House Detox & Withdrawal Centre
- Primary Health Care & Intervention Team
- Family & Individual Counselling
- ACT Needle & Syringe Program
- Treatment Support Services
- Outreach and Promotions
- Party Safe Program
- Education Program



DIRECTIONS ACT



HEP C FACT SHEET

DIRECTIONS ACT

1 BRADLEY ST WODEN

PH: (02) 6122 8000

www.directionsact.com

This brochure has been produced with the expertise and assistance of the ACT Hepatitis Resource Centre
Phone: 1300 301 383
www.hepatitisresourcecentre.com.au



**WHAT YOU
SHOULD
KNOW
IF YOU
HAVE
HEP C**

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What is Hepatitis?

Hepatitis means inflammation or swelling of the liver. Hepatitis can be caused by a number of different things like alcohol, drugs, toxins and other viruses. There are several forms of the hepatitis virus (A,B,C,D,E,F and G) which are all quite different. The main difference being how they are transmitted, along with some differing symptoms.

What is Hepatitis C?

Hepatitis C is a blood borne virus that reproduces by making many copies of itself in liver cells. The hepatitis C virus does not kill liver cells directly, but the immune response initiated by the presence of the virus in the liver can cause liver inflammation and cell death. There are six main genotypes (strains) of hepatitis C and each genotype contains numerous subtypes.

Common Symptoms

Many people don't notice any symptoms when they are first infected with Hep C, as the virus can take 10 years or more before it starts to affect the immune system. The most common symptoms that occur tend to be:

- Altered sleep patterns
- Head aches and mood swings
- Scarring and inflammation of the liver
- Brain fog: affecting cognitive ability
- Nausea, vomiting and loss of appetite
- Fatigue and tiredness: little to no energy
- Flu like symptoms: fever, chills and muscle aches
- Depression: unexplained feelings of hopelessness

Hep C Transmission

Hepatitis C is transmitted through blood to blood contact, therefore infected blood must pass from an infected person into another's. Roughly 25% of people infected with Hepatitis C will clear the virus within 2 to 6 months of being infected. The remaining 75% have an ongoing or chronic infection. However 50 to 80% of people treated with combination therapy will clear the virus completely.

Hep C is not transmitted through:

Kissing and Hugging

Hep C can only be transmitted through blood to blood contact. Unless blood is present, kissing and hugging are harmless.



Sharing cutlery and household equipment

There is no reason to be worried about catching Hep C from general household items like sharing the same toilet, shower, cups, plates, glasses, and cutlery, unless there is blood involved

Mosquitoes

Unlike Ross River Virus, Hep C cannot be transmitted through a mosquito bite as the mosquito's stomach breaks down the virus.



Pre and Post Test Counselling

Pre-test counselling aims to assess whether you are, or were ever, at risk of contracting the Hep C virus. Your G.P. or Counsellor can provide you with support. Post-test counselling enables G.P.'s and Counsellors to follow up and ensure that you understand your pre-test counselling, and offer you more information and support.

Testing

People with Hep C rarely have acute symptoms, so most people don't know that they have Hep C until they are tested.

The initial screening test for Hep C is called an antibody test, which will test whether you have ever had Hep C. Some people clear Hep C naturally, so another test called a PCR test is needed to determine whether you currently have Hep C.

There are several different genotypes of Hep C and knowing the genotype you have is helpful for making recommendations for treatment and for predicting the success of treatment, as some genotypes respond better to treatment than others.

Treatment Options

Once you have been diagnosed with the Hep C virus, it is important to seek advice early about treatment options. Treatment recommendations will be based on an assessment of your genotype, blood test results, disease stage and where relevant, a liver biopsy.

Treatment for Hep C is a combination therapy, which combines two drugs, Pegylated Interferon and Ribavirin. Pegylated Interferon is self administered by giving yourself an injection under the skin, usually in the stomach, once a week and Ribavirin capsules are taken twice daily for 6-12 months. The combination of these two drugs gives a better response than either of the drugs on their own.

Combination therapy is a rigorous treatment and should not be used by women who are pregnant or breast feeding.

The side effects may include flu like symptoms, vomiting, dry throat, fatigue, short temper, forgetfulness, depression and insomnia. Some people on treatment do not experience these.