

Hepatitis

What is Hepatitis?

Hepatitis is an inflammation of the liver that can be caused by viruses, chemicals, drugs, alcohol, inherited diseases, or your own immune system. Unlike acute hepatitis, which can flare up and then resolve itself within a few weeks to months, chronic hepatitis may simmer for 20 years or more. Then, it can cause significant symptoms related to progressive liver damage, such as cirrhosis (scarring and loss of function), liver cancer or death.

The liver is a vital organ. It performs many functions in the body, including:

- Processing the body's nutrients
- Manufacturing bile to help digest fats
- Regulating blood clotting
- Breaking down potentially toxic substances into harmless ones that the body can use or excrete

Types of Viral Hepatitis

Anyone can contract a type of hepatitis. Many people infected with hepatitis are unaware that they have the disease. The different strains of hepatitis are:

Hepatitis A – This type of hepatitis is spread when an infected person's feces gets into another person's mouth. This happens when unwashed hands touch food and eating utensils, or by eating shellfish infected by contaminated water. It can also be spread by anal or oral sex.

Hepatitis B – Hepatitis B is spread through sex, a human bite or contaminated blood exchanged when sharing needles for body piercing, tattooing or shooting drugs. It can be passed from an infected mother to her baby.

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Hepatitis C – This strain of hepatitis is spread mainly through blood contact. Sharing needles, body piercing and tattooing are all ways to contract Hepatitis C. It can also be passed from an infected mother to her baby. Unlike Hepatitis A and B, this strain is not easily spread through sex

Hepatitis D – Hepatitis D is often found in combination with Hepatitis B.

Hepatitis E – This type of hepatitis is passed in similar ways to A, but is rare in the United States and mostly seen in developing countries with contaminated water supply.

Symptoms

Symptoms for all strains of hepatitis are similar from one type to another, although children may show no symptoms. Adults may show any of the following:

- Fatigue
- Loss of appetite



- Mild fever
- Tenderness in upper abdomen
- Aching muscles and joints
- Yellow skin and whites of eyes
- Nausea or Vomiting
- Darkened urine
- Light colored feces or Diarrhea

Prevention

You can receive a vaccination for Hepatitis A and B, but there is no vaccination for Hepatitis C. In all strains though, you should do the following:

- Practice safe sex
- Use only your own razors, toothbrushes and especially needles - don't share
- Wear gloves around infected blood
- Wash your hands often
- Clean-up infected blood with bleach and water

Treatment

Treatment of hepatitis combines prevention, support, symptom relief, treatment of underlying disorders and medication.

The incidence of new cases of viral hepatitis has decreased due to use of safe injection and safe sex practices and the availability of vaccines for some strains. Screening units of blood for Hepatitis B and C has virtually eliminated infections through blood transfusions. Pregnant women are now screened for Hepatitis B. If tested positive, babies at birth are now vaccinated for the virus and this has greatly decreased new cases of Hepatitis B.

Support and symptom relief are frequently the only treatments required for acute viral Hepatitis A, B and C. Hepatitis due to parasites or bacteria is cured by treating that infection. In most cases, acute hepatitis will resolve over time.

With chronic hepatitis, the goal is to minimize further damage to the liver, to treat underlying conditions that are causing or exacerbating the condition, and to prevent transmission of viral hepatitis to others. There is treatment available for both chronic Hepatitis B and C, but it is not effective in all cases.

If you have shown signs of any of the above symptoms and have been in contact with someone recently diagnosed with hepatitis, contact your health care provider immediately. A simple blood test can show if a person has hepatitis.

For more information about Hepatitis, visit www.nih.gov.

For more information about Nationwide Better Health visit: www.nwbetterhealth.com Or contact your benefits representative.



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