



Living with hep C:

Diet and hep C

People living with a chronic illness often need to make changes to their everyday lives. The hints in this brochure are meant as a guide only. We hope that you find some of the hints or examples useful.

Why is diet so important?

Diet is very important for liver health, as it is this organ which processes the foods that you eat and makes the products needed by other parts of your body. Eating a healthy diet and adequate physical activity are the key to good health. Nutrients in the food you eat are needed to build new body tissue, repair damaged body tissue and drive the many complicated chemical reactions that let your body work.

There is no specific diet to follow if you have hepatitis C. Instead, people should aim for a well balanced and varied diet that is low in fat, as is recommended for the general population.

Healthy eating guidelines

You need a combination of protein, carbohydrate (sugar and starch), fat, vitamins, minerals and fibre in your diet to supply you with energy and keep you healthy. When you get the right type and amounts of nutrients your body will be better equipped to deal with illness and stress.

Hepatitis C can cause a loss of appetite. Some people feel nauseous after eating fatty foods and after drinking alcohol, bloated and uncomfortable. This is because your body's ability to make bile, the substance which breaks down fat during digestion, has been affected.

You can take control of improving your health through sound nutrition. Follow these six principles when shopping, cooking and eating:

- Eat as close to the original source as possible. Buy whole food as close to the way nature made it - fresh fruit and vegetables and whole grains.
- Eat a wide variety of foods. Be adventurous and expand the range of fruits and vegetables you eat. Choose foods that are in season as much as possible.
- Eat in the right balance across the food groups. Each day try to eat: 4-5 serves of salad or vegetables, 2-3 serves of fruit, 1-2 serves of grains (rice, oats, wheat, barley, corn etc.) and 1 serve of protein (fish, poultry, lean meat, natural yoghurt, eggs, legumes, lentils, soya).
- Prepare your food in a more healthy way. Try to eat as much raw food as possible - salads, raw or blanched vegetables, fresh fruit. Instead of boiling try shallow poaching, or better still, steaming.
- Substitute healthy options for less healthy foods. For example, try plain crackers instead of sweet biscuits.
- Drink at least 6 - 8 glasses of water daily.

Things you can do to keep your liver healthy

You can get into some good habits to keep your liver healthy and help it do its many jobs:

- Get plenty of regular sleep (6-10 hours a night). Don't let yourself get over-tired.
- Eat small, regular meals and snacks as this puts less strain on your liver and digestive system. Don't skip meals.
- Don't fast, your liver needs adequate amounts of nutrients to carry out its normal work.
- Drink plenty of water as your body needs it to get rid of toxins. Keep a bottle of water on your desk at work or school, nearby at home and in the car.
- Avoid saturated fats (like fatty meats, full-cream dairy products & tropical oils).
- Avoid fatty takeaway foods, alcohol and caffeine.
- Exercise regularly.



People undergoing antiviral treatment may suffer from nausea and this can make mealtimes difficult. If this is the case, try eating small snacks frequently during the course of the day, rather than eating the three traditional larger meals. Perhaps you can plan your meals for times when the nausea is least likely to occur. Choose foods that do not have a strong smell. Natural remedies such as peppermint, fresh ginger root, spearmint, chamomile, fennel seed and aniseed teas may help alleviate nausea. Your doctor may also be able to prescribe anti-nausea medication if required.

Some people on treatment lose their appetite, making it difficult to maintain an adequate supply of nutrients. Vary the colour and texture of your dishes to make meals as tempting as possible. Exercise may help to stimulate your appetite, however make sure you exercise within the limits of how you are feeling at the time. It is not usually necessary for people living with hepatitis C to require specialised dietary advice, as very few will progress to a stage of advanced liver disease. However, if you lose a significant amount of weight, have another medical condition or any other concerns, you should speak to your doctor or seek referral to a dietician.

Adapted from the Council's Website, topic originally written by Deborah Bowman, NatroPath.

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Whilst on Treatment

The criteria for access to combination treatment states that you must drink no more than seven standard alcoholic drinks per week, however it is important to remember that there is no safe drinking level for people with hepatitis C.

The less you drink, the more favourable the long-term outcome. In particular, while you are undergoing treatment it may be in your best interests to consume as little alcohol as possible.

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