

Hepatitis C and your liver health: A consultation tool

If you think that you might have hepatitis C, this tool will help you to get the most out of a chat with your support or healthcare provider.



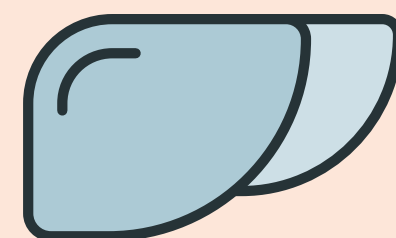
Remember, your healthcare provider is there to help you, so feel free to speak openly and ask all the questions you need to.



This material is only to be used during HCP-led consultations or conversations with healthcare support workers and should not be provided directly to the patient.



Why is my liver health important?



The liver is one of the largest organs in the human body.¹

The liver helps your body to:

- Clean your blood
- Remove waste from what you eat and drink
- Process food and absorb nutrients

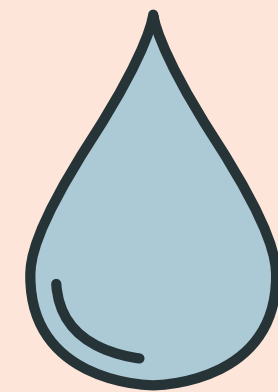
Keeping your liver healthy is essential to your overall wellbeing.¹

The following can be bad for your liver:

- Drinking a lot of alcohol²
- Using illicit drugs³
- Eating an unhealthy diet or being overweight²
- All forms of viral hepatitis, including the common forms hepatitis A, B, C, and D²



How does hepatitis C affect my liver health?



Hepatitis C is a virus that can infect the liver.⁴

It is spread when someone comes into contact with blood (or other bodily fluids) from an infected person.^{4,5}

The damage that hepatitis C does to your liver can make you feel unwell in the long term.

People living with hepatitis C might report symptoms like:⁴

- Stomach problems
- Muscle aches
- A foggy head
- Fever

As these symptoms are very general they can go unnoticed or incorrectly diagnosed for many years.⁴

The only way to know if your symptoms are caused by hepatitis C is to get tested.

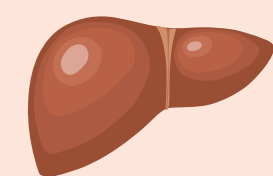


What if hepatitis C isn't treated?

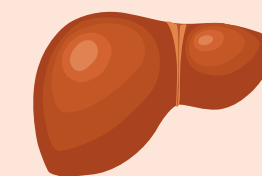


If hepatitis C isn't treated your liver can become inflamed which leads to scarring of the liver – this is called fibrosis. Extreme scarring of the liver is called cirrhosis.⁶

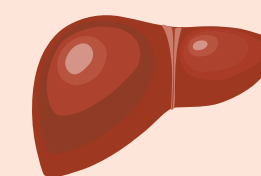
A liver with too much scar tissue can't work properly.⁶



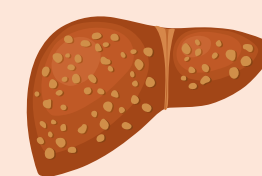
Healthy
liver



Inflamed
liver



Fibrotic
liver



Cirrhotic
liver



How do I know if I have hepatitis C?



You might not realise you have hepatitis C as for most people there are usually no symptoms at the beginning.⁴

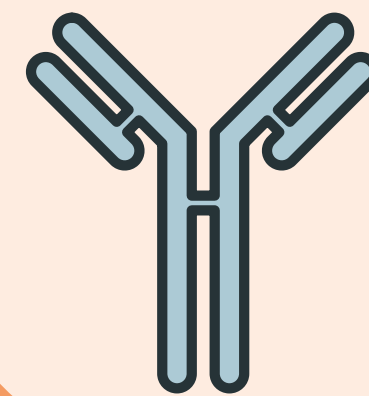
The only way to know for certain if you have hepatitis C is to get tested.

Even if you have had hepatitis C before, you can still get it again, so it's important to get tested.

There are two simple tests to diagnose it and you'll get the results in a few weeks.⁷



How to test for hepatitis C



Hepatitis C is usually diagnosed with 2 tests which can be done in the same testing visit:⁷

- Antibody test
- PCR test

Antibodies are made by your body to fight viruses. If the antibody test is positive, it means you have come into contact with the hepatitis C virus.⁷

A PCR test allows you to find out if the virus is still active in your body. The test results usually come back within 2 weeks.⁷



How might I have caught hepatitis C?



Think carefully – you could have hepatitis C if you have ever:⁵

- Injected drugs
- Had a blood transfusion abroad, or in the UK before 1991
- Had a tattoo or piercing with an unsterilised needle
- Had unprotected or rough sex with someone who has hepatitis C, including the MSM community
- Been exposed to any unsterilised medical or dental equipment abroad

If your mother had hepatitis C when you were born, there is a very small chance it could have been passed to you.⁵



If I have the
virus, how do
I make sure
I don't pass it
on to others?



Successfully treating hepatitis C means that you cannot pass it on to other people anymore.⁶

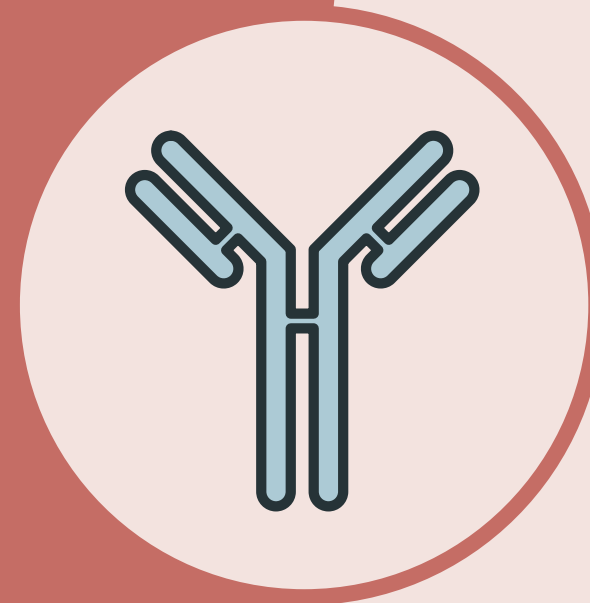
Even after you have been treated, you can still catch hepatitis C again.⁶

To reduce the risk of catching hepatitis C or passing it on, avoid:⁵

- Sharing needles, syringes and other items used to take drugs
- Having unprotected sex - this includes men who have sex with men
- Sharing your razor or toothbrush



What do my test results mean?



If your antibody test shows that you have antibodies, it means you have come into contact with the HCV virus.⁷

If your PCR test shows that the virus is live, then you have active hepatitis C and will need treatment.⁷



How long will it take to get the results?

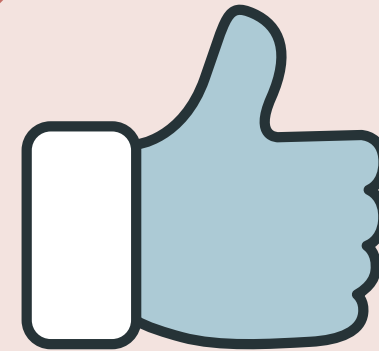


You should get your results within 2 weeks.⁷

You can also order a test online:
<https://hepctest.nhs.uk/>



Can I get treated if I test positive for hepatitis C?



Hepatitis C can be treated!

Good news: these days, most people
can be treated.⁸



What does it mean if I'm diagnosed with hepatitis C?



Hepatitis C can be treated.

- No injections are needed⁸
- Treatment can involve medicine taken as a pill⁸
- 95% of patients with hepatitis C may be cured⁹

Your healthcare provider will talk to you about what treatments are suitable for you. It's important to tell them about anything else you're taking including medicines, herbal remedies or illicit drugs.



What can I do to get better and improve my liver health?



There are things you can do to help you feel better during treatment:¹⁰

- Eat as well as you can
- Exercise regularly
- Avoid or drink less alcohol
- Smoke less, or quit if you can

Your healthcare team can offer you support and advice.



My liver health

If you think you might
have hepatitis C

Getting tested

If you are diagnosed
with hepatitis C

Getting treatment

After treatment

Advice

How do I
get treated?



Your healthcare provider will talk
to you about suitable treatments.



How could my other health conditions affect my hepatitis C treatment?



If you are taking prescription drugs for other conditions or over the counter drugs, then these may also affect your liver.¹¹

Tell your healthcare provider about any other medicines you are taking.



How do I take the treatment?



Treatment generally involves taking
tablets for 8-12 weeks.⁸



What should I be aware of during treatment?



You may experience some side effects during treatment.⁸

You may feel sick and have trouble sleeping at first.⁸

Your support or healthcare provider will be able to advise you on any side effects and how to deal with them. Let them know of any that you're experiencing.

For further information, please refer to the Patient Information leaflet.



How often do I need to see my healthcare team?



You'll normally have a blood test twice during treatment, a follow-up test, and a test three months after the treatment has finished to check you are clear.⁸



How can I avoid getting hepatitis C again?



Take care: even after you have been treated you can still catch hepatitis C again.⁸

To reduce the risk of catching hepatitis C again, try to avoid:⁵

- Sharing needles, syringes and other items used to take drugs
- Having unprotected sex - this includes men who have sex with men
- Sharing your razor or toothbrush



Where can I go for more advice, support or to learn more about hepatitis C?



For advice, support or to learn more about hepatitis C you can talk to:

- Your GP
- A sexual health clinic
- Drug and alcohol support services
- Your pharmacist

You can also confidentially find out more from The Hepatitis C Trust on 020 7089 6221 or email helpline@hepctrust.org.uk.





References

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