

Co-infection – HCV and HIV

This usually refers to being infected with both HIV and Hep C. HCV progresses quicker in co-infected people due to HIV decreasing the immune system which allows the HCV virus to flourish. The success of treatment is reduced to about 35% in co-infections and the following points have to be considered before starting treatment:

- HIV is under good control.
- CD-4 count of 250 or better (white blood cell count) and an undetectable viral load.
- Co-infection causes a delayed reaction to treatment.
- Interferon lowers the white blood cells so you may be more prone to infections.
- There may be interactions between your HIV meds and the HCV meds, so make sure your doctor knows all medications you are taking.
- Medication dosages need to be monitored in order to avoid drug toxicity.

Alternative Therapies

Many alternative therapies are available, although there are no documented cases of any of these therapies clearing the virus from anyone. Due to interactions between some herbs and HCV meds, consult with your doctor before starting any herbal treatments. Some holistic approaches, however, do have benefits in dealing with the side effects of treatment.

Liver Transplants

Transplants are only considered after someone experiences liver failure. The success rate is about 80%. However, medication is required for the rest of your life to avoid your body rejecting the transplant. For those co-infected, transplants are harder to get, but not impossible. Although there are long waiting times, transplants are available in Canada. Transplants are also available in the USA, at a cost of close to \$200,000.00 dollars.

Currently there are no future options available to treat HCV, however, research is ongoing and this situation may change at any time.

Additional Information

This **Six Pamphlet Series**, along with the accompanying **Resource Directory**, is designed to provide you with a support network of resources within your community, a better understanding of Hepatitis C and how to prevent its spread, treatment options available and how to take control of your life through healthy lifestyle choices.

- **See** the Manitoba Hepatitis C Resource Directory for a glossary of terms and definitions and HCV resource contacts within the community.
- **Read** the entire **Six Pamphlet Series on Hepatitis C**: Hepatitis C - The Basic Facts, Hepatitis C and Your Liver, Hepatitis C - Infection and Prevention, Treatment Options for Hepatitis C, Healthy Living With Hepatitis C and Psychosocial Aspects of Hepatitis C.
- **Contact** the Manitoba Hepatitis C Support Community by telephone at: 779-6464, email: info@mbhepc.org or through our website: www.mbhepc.org

Hepatitis C

Treatment Options

Pamphlet # **4**
in a 6 Pamphlet Series
On Hepatitis C

- **Treatment Goals & Questions**
- **Medications Used to Treat the Hepatitis C Virus**
- **Co-infection – HCV & HIV**
- **Alternative Therapies**



Treatment Goals & Questions

The goal of treatment is to eliminate HCV from your body. You and your doctor will know if treatment is successful if HCV cannot be measured in your blood for six months after treatment ends. This is known as sustained viral response (SVR).

Certain factors will increase your chances:

- Adhering to following your medications, time and dosage
- The degree of fibrosis
- The amount of inflammation already present in your liver

Treatment is generally considered when ALT levels are elevated AND confirmation of inflammation or fibrosis is done with a biopsy

Questions you need to ask:

What are my chances?

What genotype, or strain of the virus do I have?

Do I have any other health conditions that will affect treatment?

Am I pregnant or considering pregnancy?

Will HCV lead to health problems for me if untreated?

Can I follow the treatment schedule?

Can I tolerate the side effects?

Can I take time off work if needed?

What will be the impact of the side effects on my life from a treatment that may or may not work?

Can I afford the treatment?

Due to the side-effects of treatment people with certain medical conditions **may not** be recommended for treatment:

- Autoimmune disorders such as severe arthritis or active uncontrolled thyroid disease
- Autoimmune hepatitis
- Uncontrolled diabetes
- Heart disease
- Respiratory disease
- Anemia
- Certain types of mental illness

Note: *Autoimmune is when your body's antibodies attack your own cells or tissues.*

Medications Used to Treat the Hepatitis C Virus

At present there are only two forms of treatment.

Monotherapy: Interferon alone which is only used with people who cannot tolerate Ribavirin

Combination Therapy: this is both pegylated Interferon and Ribavirin. Depending on your genotype this treatment can last up to a year.

Interferon

This is a synthetic form of a protein used to fight viruses in your body. It is injected under the skin once a week with pegylated (time released) interferon.



Some common side effects could include:

- Fever
- Temporary nausea and vomiting
- Lowering of white blood cells
- Brain fog
- Depression
- Hair loss
- Vision problems
- Insomnia

Less common side effects could also include:

- Fatigue
- Loss of appetite
- Diarrhea
- Irritability
- Hallucinations
- Mood swings (anger)
- Nightmares

Side effects diminish after two to three weeks in about 70% of people and around 3% have to stop treatment because of the side effects. Stopping treatment is the only way to stop the side effects.

Ribavirin

This drug interferes with the way the virus reproduces and improves the effectiveness of Interferon and Ribavirin **is not** effective by itself. The side effects may be:

- Drop in your hemoglobin
- A non-productive cough
- A rash and/or itching
- May induce fetal deformities

The success rate of medications has increased dramatically since 1998, from approximately 30% to almost 90%.