

HealthyActions

Achieving Your Goals for Healthy Living



Beating Hep C: What to Expect When Taking My Medicine

It is very important that you take your pills and give yourself shots as your doctor has told you. Not missing doses makes it more likely that your body will get rid of the hepatitis C virus.⁴ Find ways to remind yourself to take the hepatitis C drugs.

The main goal of hepatitis C treatment is to clear the virus from your body.¹ This is usually done by treatment with interferon (in-tuhr-FEER-on) and ribavirin (rie-buh-VIE-run).² The treatment lasts six months to a year.³ During treatment you give yourself shots. You also take pills. You see your doctor or another member of your health care team often. Your doctor tests your blood to see how your body reacts to treatment.

You should take the hepatitis C drugs on a regular schedule. They work best this way.³ Most often patients give themselves an interferon shot once a week. Pick a day and a time that you will give yourself the shot. Stick to this schedule.³ You will most likely be taking ribavirin pills also. Pill boxes that you buy at the drug store can help you remember to take them. You might also want to use a calendar to keep track of shots and pills.

Dealing With Side Effects

The drugs that are used to treat hepatitis C have side effects. A side effect is when a drug causes you to have a problem like a stomachache or a rash. The side effects from hepatitis C drugs can be significant.¹ They include¹:

- Fever and body aches
- Being very tired
- Depression

Side effects are most often worse during the first few weeks of treatment.¹ Talk to your doctor about side effects *when they first start*. Your doctor can help you manage your side effects before they get too difficult.⁵



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Why is having an early virologic response (EVR) so important? Patients who don't have an EVR are unlikely to have a sustained virologic response (SVR).⁶ This means there is no virus in your blood six months after you have stopped treatment. This probably means the virus is gone for good.⁷

Tips for Coping with Side Effects

- Keep all your doctor's appointments.⁵
- Tell your doctor all the other drugs and supplements you take.
- Get lab work done on time. This way your doctor may be able to prevent problems.
- Many patients do better if they have their shot before bedtime on the night before their weekend begins (Friday night for most people).³
- Every day, drink 8-10 glasses of water and other liquids (no alcohol).³ (Your doctor may advise you to drink more, based on your weight.) Limit the amount of caffeine you drink.
- Eat small healthy meals throughout the day. Avoid greasy or spicy food.²
- Get enough sleep. Take naps if you need to. Plan ahead so that you can rest on your "down" days.²

Why Not Skipping Meds is So Important

Taking your hepatitis C drugs as your doctor tells you may mean treatment will work better. Studies show that taking correct doses and not missing doses during the first 12 weeks of treatment is very important.⁴ Keeping a strict treatment schedule during the first twelve weeks means there's a higher chance you'll have what is called an "early virologic response" (EVR).⁴ An EVR is when your blood is tested at Week 12 and⁶:

- The hepatitis C virus cannot be found -OR-
- The level of the virus is very low.

References

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