

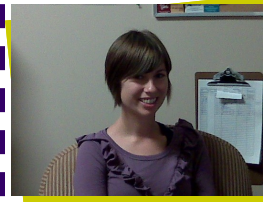
Notes:

Lined area for notes.

HEP C NEWS

Inside this issue:

Frequently Asked Questions About Hep C	2
Myths About Hep C	3
Newly Diagnosed	4
Personal Hep C Story	5
Staying Healthy with Hep C	5
Treatment	6
Healthy Recipes	7
Nutritious Choices	7
Counterpoint Equipment	8
Tips For Getting Off Opiates	9
Hep C Services at ACOL	10
Resources	11



Sheila Coad
Hepatitis C Educator/Support Worker

We're ACOL's new Hepatitis C workers. We provide education and support any chance we get. Bringing up the topic of a health issue, like Hep C, isn't always the easiest thing to do. By sharing what we know, we hope we can help make the topic a little easier to talk about.



Sarah Wood
Harm Reduction/HCV Peer Support /Worker

What Is Hep C?

Hep C: The Basics

What is Hep C?

Hep C is a virus that is carried in blood. The virus infects the liver and causes inflammation and scarring. The body is tough and may be able to fight the infection, but most often Hep C is stronger and causes ongoing infection.

Transmission and Prevention

Hep C is spread by blood-to-blood contact. You can get Hep C from sharing needles, pipes, straws, cookers, filters, ties or water for drug use with others, including your sex partner. You can also get Hep C from piercing or tattooing equipment (including ink) already used on someone else. Sometimes you can get it from razors, nail clippers and toothbrushes, even if you can't see the blood. Having unpro-

tected sex with someone who has Hep C also carries some risk for infection.

What are the Symptoms?

Many people don't have any symptoms when they first get Hep C. As the disease gets worse, some people start to feel tired all the time, have body aches, dry, itchy skin, "brain fog", or notice a yellowing of the skin.

What Are the Tests for Hep C?

The only way to know if you have Hep C is to have a number of blood tests done.

- **HCV antibody test:** This looks for antibodies in the blood. If you test positive, you've been exposed to Hep C in the past and will have antibodies for the

rest of your life. You need a second test to find out if the virus is still active in your body.

- **RNA test:** This test is done after a positive antibody test. If it's positive, you have Hep C.
- **Viral load test:** This test tells you how much virus you have in your blood.
- **Genotype test:** This test checks to see which of the six Hep C genotypes you have. A genotype is a type of Hep C.

*The Viral Load and Genotype tests are done at the same time as the RNA test so you don't need to have more blood taken.

* Other tests might be done to show how your liver is working. These include: Liver function tests, Biopsy, Ultrasound.

Check out our next Winter Edition!

If you have any ideas or suggestions for the next newsletter let us know!

FAQ's Frequently Asked Questions About Hep C

How will I know if I have Hep C?

You can live for many years without experiencing symptoms even though the virus may be damaging your liver. The best way to find out if you have Hep C is to get your blood tested.

What are the effects?

Most people don't show any signs or symptoms when they first get Hep C. If they do, the symptoms are very general and are often mistaken for other illnesses. As years pass and the disease progresses, people may start to feel symptoms like:

- tiredness all the time
- dry, itchy skin
- "brain fog"
- yellowing of skin & eyes

What are the chances of getting/spreading Hep C through sex?

Getting Hep C by having sex isn't very common, but it could happen if you have sex with a lot of different people and/or engage in risky behaviour—especially "rough" sex and other sexual practices that involve blood.

Can I get treatment?

Yes. Hep C is treated by taking two medications—peg-interferon and ribavirin. Treatment takes six months to one year, depending on what strain you have. Many people finish treatment and are able to get rid of the virus.

Do I have to get treated?

A healthcare provider can help you decide if treatment is right for you. Even if you don't choose treatment, there are still many things you can do to help your liver stay healthy. Some of these things include: eating a balanced diet, cutting-down or stopping drinking alcohol, getting regular exercise, joining a support group.

Needle Exchanges Available at:

AIDS Committee of London
#30 – 186 King Street
519-434-1601

Counterpoint Outreach
519-851-3548

Youth Action Centre
141 Dundas Street
519-434-6500

Middlesex London Health Unit
50 King Street
519-663-5317

My Sisters Place
566 Dundas Street
519-679-9570

Look for more info on our website!
www.aidslondon.com

Hepatitis C Resources in London

AIDS Committee of London	519-434-1601
Canadian Liver Foundation	519-659-0951
Middlesex-London Health Unit	519-663-5317
Hemophilia Ontario	519-432-2365
Sue Tobin-InterCommunity Health	519-600-0874

Hepatitis C Monthly Meetings

Do you have questions about Hepatitis C?

Do you want to meet others in a similar situation?

Come to the AIDS Committee of London at #30 – 186 Kings Street for:

Living with Hepatitis C Monthly Meeting with Sue Tobin

Held at Mission Services Safe Haven
3rd Thursday of every month from 1:30-3pm

"C" Life Peer Support Group

Held at the AIDS Committee of London
1st Tuesday of every month from 7-9pm

Food and refreshments will be provided at each meeting.

For details call Sarah at 519-434-1601

Hep C Services @ The AIDS Committee of London

Here's the type of Hep C work we're doing around ACOL:

Client Support

- One-on-one counselling around Hep C information
- Referral and advocacy for testing services, support groups, addiction services, social networks, medical services, basic needs services
- Support for treatment related activities - visits, phone calls, counselling and referrals

Information Sessions

- Presentations on the facts about Hep C, transmission risk and ways to prevent getting the virus

Drug Using Health Promotion Sessions

- Sessions about Hep C and the risks related to injection drug use
- Topics: drug use and care options, treatment, support, safer using techniques and related health matters (vein care, bad drug warnings, Strep A risks, etc)

Living with Hepatitis C Monthly Meeting with Sue Tobin

- Topics: What is Hepatitis C? The Liver, Treatment, Nutrition and Healthy Lifestyle, Mental Health

Hep C Peer Support Group

- A monthly group providing emotional and social support to people living with Hep C

Hep C Newsletter

- A publication about Hep C, prevention, treatment care and our programming

* We're always looking for your participation! Submit an article, piece of artwork, or something that interests you about Hep C.

For more information about any of our services, call Sheila or Sarah at 519-434-1601 or just drop by.

Common **MYTHS** About Hep C

MYTH:

If my Hep C was really serious, I would have symptoms.

FACT:

Many people don't feel sick when they are first infected with Hep C, but liver damage can happen with or without symptoms.

MYTH:

Hep C is a death sentence.

FACT:

Hep C isn't a death sentence. There are many things you can do to stay healthy. See our section on "Staying Healthy" for tips how.

MYTH:

I can't get Hep C because I was immunized in school.

FACT:

There's no vaccine for Hep C. Many students have been immunized for Hepatitis B through school-based immunization programs. It's important to get vaccinated against Hepatitis A and B (if you haven't already been infected) to prevent making your Hep C worse.

MYTH:

Since I can live a long time with Hep C, treatment will work just fine if I wait to start.

FACT:

Studies have found that Hep C patients who are treated before liver damage occurs may respond better to treatment.

MYTH:

Hep C is not as common as HIV.

FACT:

Worldwide, there are more people with Hep C than with HIV. Hep C is easier to catch than HIV and one of the reasons is that the Hep C virus can survive longer outside the body than HIV.

MYTH:

The side effects of treatment are worse than the disease itself.

FACT:

Everybody is different when it comes to side effects. Some people have no side effects at all, while others are bothered more. If needed, we can provide you with tips to help ease the effects of treatment.

Newly Diagnosed...Now What?

Living With Hepatitis C

By Sue Tobin, Nurse Practitioner, London Intercommunity Health Centre

The first reaction of many people who find out that they have Hepatitis C is a feeling of hopelessness. Shame, guilt and feeling dirty are common responses to finding out you have Hep C. . . Many newly diagnosed persons also want to get rid of it as fast as possible. And others don't know what to think - they feel fine, so what's the big deal?

None of these reactions are wrong, and in fact they are all normal. But once the news sinks in and you have an opportunity to learn more about this infection, it's time to learn to live with Hepatitis C. For some this means pursuing treatment, for others it means changing their lifestyle, and for others it means being more careful, or all of the above!

I would like to share with you some ideas about how you can LIVE with hepatitis C. It is not a death sentence and doesn't mean you can't be close to those you care about. Most Hepatitis C positive people can live "normal" lives with just some extra care and attention to yourself and your environment.

1. The basics...EAT SLEEP, and DRINK WATER. Medications aren't the only form of treatment. The symptoms of Hep C, such as fatigue, stomach upset, and joint pain can be reduced by eating 3 balanced meals per day - that means meat, milk products, bread, fruits and vegetables and avoiding food with lots of additives, fat and salt. If you can't afford to eat well and you are on Ontario Works or ODS, ask your worker for a Special Diet form and have it filled out for "Liver Disease" and "Malabsorption". It won't get you much more money, but it will help. Shop wisely and accept healthy free food every chance you get! Our body heals itself

when we sleep - it should be called HEALING SLEEP instead of BEAUTY SLEEP! So listen to your body, don't fight it, take a nap and sleep as much as you can. Water helps cleanse the body and helps the liver do its work so drink lots and lots of water.

2. Stay away from ALCOHOL. Even though you don't get hepatitis from booze, it is the absolute worse thing for it. It is like throwing gasoline on a fire! More alcohol, more Hepatitis C virus! If you need help with this, there are lots of agencies and service providers who would be willing to help you - just ask!

3. Decrease the amount of DRUGS you use. Drugs are broken down through the liver and interfere in your liver's ability to heal (yes your liver CAN repair itself - amazing!). Some drugs are toxic to your liver.

Most people who find themselves addicted to drugs also have a lower immune system. Your body needs a healthy immune system to fight off infections. People who have Hepatitis C get sicker easier because some components of the immune system are built in your liver - if the liver isn't working well, neither is your immune system. Ask for help if you need to...

4. Stay safe and be safe. Don't share drug equipment; don't share razors, toothbrushes and nail clippers. Cover any wounds or sores you may have. Double bag and throw away blood-soiled items so others won't be exposed to your blood. Wash your hands a lot. Clean surfaces exposed to your blood with 1 part bleach, 10 parts water and soak the area for 10 minutes. Hepatitis C can live up to a WEEK on table tops, drug equipment, etc.



Coming Off Opiates

By Karen Burton
Needle Exchange Coordinator



Please be advised that I am not a healthcare provider. The medications listed below may not work for everyone.

If you have Hep C, always check with your healthcare provider before you take any herbal or "natural" medicine to make sure that the medications are safe for your liver.



Take care of yourself during this time. If you do have any extra cash buy something to spoil yourself (not drugs!!)
If you need any help with anything do not hesitate to come in to see me. I do not just hand out needles you know!
Good luck, and remember if it does not work out this time; it does not mean that it won't in the future. And at least your body has had a rest.— KB

If you're trying to detox from opiates the following may help make life a bit more comfortable for you:

IMODIUM is an over the counter opiod used for diarrhea; it doesn't cross the blood brain barrier so it won't cause any euphoric effects.

HERBAL REMEDIES like Valerian and Skullcap are very effective in helping with sleep and anxiety. Don't drink ANY alcohol if you are taking these herbal remedies. Black cohosh may help relieve the hot flashes.

DARK CHOCOLATE contains Theo bromine and phenethylamine; these are both helpful with alleviating depression. Make sure that you have a good quality dark chocolate (60%).

Take VITAMINS C and B, drink lots of WATER, if you can EXERCISE, do, this will release your endorphins and take your mind off the sickness.

Take lots of WARM SHOWERS or BATHS. Keep the hair-dryer near the toilet so that when you are sitting on the toilet shivering you can put the hairdryer on full blast to warm yourself.

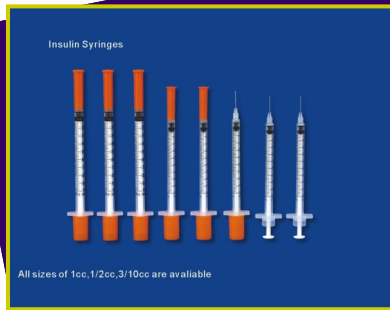
EAT as HEALTHILY as you can. Try to avoid fatty foods. Protein shakes work really well, protein helps you to curb that sweet tooth.

How Counterpoint's Equipment Prevents Hepatitis C Transmission

By Nick Scrivo
IDU Outreach Worker



Most people know that you can get Hep C from sharing syringes, but a lot of people don't know how all the other Counterpoint equipment prevents the spread of Hep C. This article can be used as a simple guide to understanding how Hep C is spread from each piece of equipment and what the risks are.



Hep C can live outside of the body for a long time and it can live inside a syringe for an even longer time. You only need a microscopic amount of the virus present to be infected. The virus can be inside the hollow needle but it can also live inside the barrel of the syringe itself. Even cleaning a syringe with bleach won't kill the Hep C virus all the time.

Hep C can also live on surfaces for very long periods of time. Using a cooker or spoon that someone else has used means that that spoon or cooker can have Hep C on the surface, in the mix, or in the wash.



Using sterile water instead of tap or bottled water is good because it doesn't have chlorine, fluoride, sediment or dirt in it that can damage your veins and cause abscesses and other infections. However Hep C can live in any fluid including the sterile water that Counterpoint gives away. The water may not look dirty, but if the water has come in contact with a needle or a cooker or spoon that has already been used then you can get Hep C from it.



Once a filter is used it gets wet and when something is wet bacteria starts to grow. Saving and reusing filters for a wash or just to use again can cause serious bacterial infections and cotton fever. Like every other piece of equipment, if the filter comes into contact with Hep C then the virus will live on the filter and if it is reused you can get it.



It is estimated that between 50%-80% of people who inject drugs have Hep C and most are not sure how they got it. Many people do not get Hep C from directly sharing syringes but by exchanging and sharing much of the other equipment.

Remember to use everything just once and to try and always have your own equipment.

Don't Despair

One Person's Anonymous Account

I have always had the intention of quitting the injection of opiates. I had succeeded for awhile with the assistance of the methadone program. In the process I was tested for HIV and Hep C. I was really worried about the HIV test so for the next couple of weeks I had the world on my shoulders. I thought I had always been careful and clean when injecting my drugs, but "what ifs" kept nagging at my brain. Fortunately and to my relief that test came back negative, but I was shocked to discover I had Hep C. I felt horrible in the doctor's office because all I knew was that Hep C was the worst (out of A, B, C). I had only really been thinking of the HIV test so I was not prepared. I broke down into tears in the doctor's office. I did not know how my boyfriend of 2 years was going to react and how I would tell him. The doctor assured me if I stayed on the methadone program and remained "clean", I would receive the treatment needed for the Hep C. He also assured me I probably would not even have any of the symptoms.

When I started injecting I was not really educated. I had thought I was using common sense by only sharing needles with my now ex-boyfriend of ten years. This may or may not be the way I got infected. I do regret some of the choices I have made when it came to my drug use. Now I had the burden of telling a great guy that there is a chance that he could be positive with Hep C as well. It took about two weeks for me to break the news that he could be positive. I am surprised at how sensitive he has been with me. He does plan to get tested as well in the near future.

I am sorry to say that I did not remain on the methadone program. For now treatment for me is really up in the air. I am constantly battling my addiction to the opiates and the needle.

Having Hep C has affected my life in that I am aware that I could infect people so I am now cautious. This has actually made me feel kind of dirty.

I am not an expert at all, but I did attend an information session at the AIDS Committee of London about Hep C and it made me feel optimistic.

One day I will clean up my act, get treated and this will all be history.

-Anonymous



Staying Healthy with Hepatitis C

Whether you decide to get treatment or not there are a few things that everyone with Hep C should think about doing to stay healthy:

- Get the Hepatitis A and B vaccines if you haven't already been infected so your Hep C doesn't get worse.
- See your healthcare provider for regular check ups.
- Try to cut back on alcohol, tobacco and drugs to prevent further damage to your liver.
- Get light or moderate exercise to keep you fit and give you energy.
- Take a break when you need one.
- Eat a healthy and balanced diet that includes lots of fruits and vegetables.
- Drink 6 to 8 glasses of water every day.
- Avoid or reduce stress.
- Practice safer sex.
- Maintain friendships and social contacts.
- Join a Hep C support group.

Treatment

Not everyone needs to be treated for Hep C. But if you are thinking about being treated, there are many things to think about. The decision should be made by you and your healthcare provider based on how Hepatitis C is affecting you, your viral load, genotype and how much your liver is damaged.

The good news is that there are meds to treat Hep C. Treatment helps reduce liver inflammation, it may reverse liver damage (scarring), slow down disease progression, and lessen your viral load, which is what needs to happen to clear the virus.

However, treatment isn't easy and making the decision to treat is a difficult one for most people. Talk to your healthcare provider about the possible benefits and side effects.

If you and your healthcare provider have decided to treat your Hep C, this usually means taking 2 drugs. One is pegylated interferon, which will be injected once a week. The second is a pill called ribavirin, which will be taken twice a day with food. The usual length of treatment is about one year for genotypes 1, 4, 5, and 6 because they take longer to respond to treatment, and about 6 months for genotypes 2 and 3 because they respond faster to treatment.

The meds used to treat Hep C can have side effects like headaches and light fevers, feeling tired, feeling down, anxious or depressed, losing weight and no appetite, sick to your stomach, trouble sleeping, skin rashes, anemia (low red blood cells), dry cough and birth defects. Some people say that these side effects remind them of the way they felt when they tried to stop taking drugs. The good news is that most of these side effects can be taken care of by working closely with a healthcare provider.

Sticking to Hep C therapy is an important predictor of reducing your viral load. The basic message is that you should take as close to 100% of the meds, 100% of the time or as close to 100% as possible – especially during the first twelve weeks of treatment.

When looking at potential responses to treatment, genotype is very important. People with genotype 1 have about a 50% chance of clearing the virus and people with genotypes 2 or 3 have about a 70-90% chance. The viral load is also an important factor in treatment response. The lower the viral load the better the chance of clearing the virus.

Treatment is considered successful if the virus cannot be found in the blood six months after you end the meds; this is called sustained virological response (SVR).

However, it is possible to get another Hep C infection even after successful treatment, so take care not to get infected again.



Recipes

RASPBERRY-BANANA SMOOTHIE

- 2 bananas, peeled and sliced
- 1 1/2 cups pineapple juice
- 1 (8-ounce) carton vanilla low-fat yogurt
- 1 cup fresh or frozen raspberries

Place bananas in a single layer on a baking sheet; freeze until hard. Combine bananas, pineapple juice, yogurt, and raspberries in container of an electric blender; process until smooth.

Serve immediately.

Recipe Makes: 5 cups



Wanna make your own Ensure? It's easy!
2 tbsp Infant Formula-Powder
2-4oz water (to desired thickness)
1 pudding cup (of any flavor)
Mix ingredients together vigorously with a fork or in a blender

Low-Cost Nutritious Choices

Eating well doesn't have to be expensive. Low-cost nutritious choices can be found in each food group:

- > bread, rice, pasta, rolled oats
- > carrots, potatoes, frozen vegetables, apples, in-season berries
- > milk powder, plain milk or yogurt
- > baked beans, eggs, dried beans, peas and lentils, canned fish, ground beef

POWER PASTA

Ingredients:

- 1/2 cup Rotini, tri-colored or macaroni (cooked and chilled)
- 1/4 cup shredded mozzarella cheese
- 1/4 cup chopped raw broccoli
- 1/4 cup canned or frozen, thawed peas/carrot blend
- 1 fresh tomato, cut into wedges
- 1/4 chopped celery
- 1 tablespoon plain non-fat yogurt
- 1 tablespoon Parmesan cheese
- 1/8 teaspoon garlic powder

Combine salad ingredients in a bowl. For dressing, combine yogurt, Parmesan cheese and garlic powder.

Add dressing to salad and toss. Chill.

Recipe Makes: 1 serving.