



HEP C NEWS



Sarah Wood
Hepatitis C Educator/Support Worker

We're ACOL's 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.



Nicole Elliott
Harm Reduction/HCV Peer Support /Worker

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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 unprotected

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 that 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.

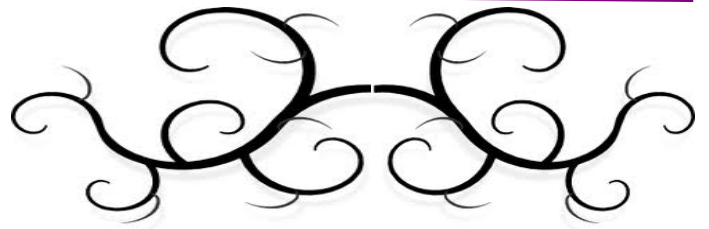
*Other tests might be done to see how your liver is working. These include: Liver function test, Biopsy, Ultrasound.

Want to have the newsletter emailed to you? Contact swood@aidslondon.com

Something you were looking for that you didn't see in here? Contact us and we will help you find it!

FAQ'S

Frequently
Asked
Questions
About Hep C (HCV)



Can HCV be spread through sex?

Yes, but it is not that common. Engaging in sex where there is a higher chance of blood being present, such as anal sex, rough sex, dry sex, or sex with a menstruating woman, increases your chances of transmission. But normally, transmission of HCV through sex is considered low risk.

How long can HCV last on things outside of the body?

Recent studies have shown that the virus can live outside of the body anywhere from 16 hours up to 4 days.

How long after exposure to HCV does it take to test positive?

It is possible to find HCV within 1 to 2 weeks after being infected with the virus.

What is the difference between Hepatitis A, B, C?

Hepatitis A, B, and C are the three most common types of Hepatitis, but these three viruses are completely unrelated. Hep A is a relatively mild viral infection that does not cause a chronic disease; Hep B and Hep C are serious viral infections that can cause chronic illness leading to liver damage and liver cancer.

Is it possible to have HCV and not know it?

Many people can have HCV for years and experience no symptoms and by the time they realize it they have serious liver damage. The only way to know for sure if you have it is to get tested.



If I had HCV but cleared it, I cannot get it again

Although your body's immune system makes antibodies to HCV, these antibodies do not protect you. The virus changes so quickly that it escapes your body's defenses. This means that just because you have had it once you are not protected from getting it again.

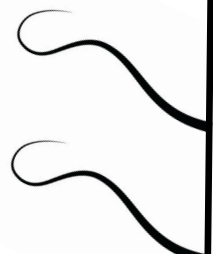


HCV can be transmitted through a mosquito bite

No it cannot. There are no known cases of transmission through this method.

If I have HCV I can share drug equipment with other people who have HCV

Not everyone has the same kind of HCV, there are 6 different types and you can get more than one type at a time. If you share equipment with someone who has a different type of HCV then you, you can also contract their type and it will make yours even worse.

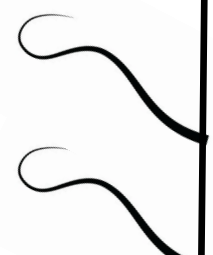


Natural herbs are a good and safe way to relieve HCV symptoms

Although herbs and other supplements may seem appealing, a number of them can actually cause more harm to your liver, leading to even more severe liver damage and possibly death. It is because of this that HCV positive people are advised to talk to a health care provider before experimenting with any types of herbs.

There are no effective treatments for HCV

There is currently a treatment for HCV that consists of weekly shots of Peg-Interferon and daily pills of Ribavirin. Treatment length depends on the type of HCV you have, but can be either 6 months or a year long.



A high HCV viral load means you will have more symptoms

Your viral load does not relate to how severe your disease is. Having a high viral load does not mean that you are sicker and will experience more symptoms. It varies from person to person.



Shop Healthy, Eat Healthier

Trying to shop for a balanced diet can be a challenge, especially when time and money are substantial factors. Being a chef, cost effectiveness is a huge consideration while preparing healthy and balanced dishes. In this article I'll be lending my expertise and 'tricks of the trade' to help you be a healthy and frugal food shopper. I will also give you some recipes that can be made with minimal money while incorporating food supplied by food banks.

We live in one of the most bountiful food producing regions of the world. Taking advantage of what our area has to offer is the best way to take care of both your body and your wallet. During the early months of summer, my partner and I go down to the Riverside Park across from our house and pick wild blackberries. Our last harvest yielded 4 pounds of plump, sweet berries full of vitamin C and anti-oxidants and all for free! Shopping at farmers markets instead of grocery stores will lower your total food bill while supporting local farmers and food producers.

The Western Fair Farmers Market, open Saturdays and located at Dundas and Egerton, is a great place to shop for inexpensive fruits, vegetables and meats. Unlike a 'big box' grocery store, you can actually talk to the people that produced the food you're buying and if you go closer to closing time, more deals can be had. When cooking fruits and vegetables, it's not necessary to buy 'perfect' looking products, ask vendors if they have any produce that isn't sellable and you'll save even more. These products are excellent for cooking into stews, sauces and soups that you can buy for cheap or even get free from food banks, to increase vitamins, minerals and fiber. When buying vegetables, look for things such as beets or dark green leafy produce like swiss chard or spinach, as they are rich in iron and other essential minerals. Eating your veggies raw is the best way to optimize their nutritional value. Try buying spinach or mixed greens, cutting up some veggies, and topping with a dressing of your choice, this makes a great salad on it's own or an excellent side dish instead of cooked vegetables. Tossing in seeds, nuts or hard boiled eggs can be a yummy source of protein.

A common myth is having to give up things like meat because of a tight food budget. Buying lesser cuts of meats or fish can be an inexpensive way to get your protein without compromising taste. If you're a vegetarian, beans, grains (quinoa or bulgar) and legumes (lentils, peas or peanuts) are an excellent way to get the protein your body needs. Eggs, canned fish and peanut butter are great sources of protein but those of you watching your cholesterol, should keep in mind that peanut butter is high in fat. The recipes that follow are an example of a well balanced lunch or dinner. Vegetarians can substitute extra vegetables, cooked grains or tofu instead of chicken.



If you have any cooking questions or want more recipes, please feel free to e-mail me at chefdanigruden@hotmail.com and I'll do my best to answer your questions. Or sign up for a monthly cooking session with me at the AIDS Committee of London. Bon appetite and healthy eating. Cheers!

Recipes



CHICKEN AND VEGETABLE PASTA BAKE

- 1 onion finely diced
- 1/2 cup each of zucchini, eggplant and red peppers, diced
- 2 cloves garlic chopped
- 2-3 chicken thighs, skinned, boned and diced
- 1 jar of tomato sauce
- 3 cups dried pasta (penne, rotini, macaroni are best)
- 2 tablespoons vegetable oil
- salt and pepper to taste
- 1 cup shredded cheese (optional)

Bring water to a boil in a 4 quart pot, salt the water and add pasta. Stir until water comes back to a boil, reduce heat and cook for 8-10 minutes until pasta is al dente. Drain and rinse and set aside. In a large frying pan on medium high heat, add 1 tablespoon of oil and cook diced chicken until browned. Remove from pan and turn down heat to medium. Add the other tablespoon of oil and sauté onions until transparent. Add other vegetables and garlic and cook until tender. Add cooked chicken and tomato sauce and cook for another 5 mins. Add cooked pasta to sauce and pour into an oven proof baking dish, cover with cheese and cover with foil and bake for 1/2 hour in 350 degree oven. Cut into squares and serve with a spinach and bean salad. If you wanted to freeze this dish, skip the baking stage, wrap and freeze. 5-6 servings.

SPINACH AND BEAN SALAD

- 2 cups raw spinach, washed, drained and torn into bite size pieces
- 1 can of beans (kidney, black or chickpeas)
- 1/2 cup sliced red onions
- dressing of your choice (vinaigrettes are better for this recipe than creamy ones)
- or if you're feeling adventurous, here is a standard vinaigrette recipe
- 1/3 cup vinegar (red wine, cider or balsamic...can also substitute lemon or lime juice)
- 1 cup vegetable or olive oil
- 1 clove garlic, finely chopped
- 1-2 teaspoon of a dried herb such as oregano, basil or thyme
- salt and pepper to taste

To make vinaigrette: add garlic, vinegar or citrus juice and herbs in a bowl. While whisking with a fork, add the oil slowly until all incorporated. The dressing will start to get thicker. Set aside

To assemble salad: rinse and drain beans and add onions and vinaigrette until coated, let stand for 1/2 hour. Put spinach in a bowl or side of plate and scoop beans and vinaigrette on top and serve with pasta. Makes a great healthy salad on its own too!



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

Dealing with Hep C and Fatigue

Fatigue is a feeling of excessive tiredness and lack of energy. Many people with chronic Hep C experience no symptoms for most of their lives, but for the symptoms that are felt fatigue is the most common one, with approximately 67% of Hep C positive people experiencing it. Fatigue symptoms tend to come and go and be mild, but generally people with more advanced chronic Hep C tend to experience more severe symptoms of fatigue. This isn't always the case though and one should not assume that the severity of their fatigue symptoms is always an indicator of disease progression. The major factor of Hep C that contributes to feelings of fatigue is the work that the immune system is constantly doing to try and fight off the virus, generally with no success. This requires a lot of energy and resources from the body.

When looking at how to manage fatigue it is important to be aware of the negative effects of alcohol, drug use, lack of rest and an unhealthy lifestyle on the liver and its ability to function. This will all in turn contribute to feelings of fatigue. As well as looking at these behaviors and seeing if you can alter your lifestyle a bit, there are also small tips that can help you best manage your daily fatigue symptoms. This is important to try and keep on top of since fatigue can also often lead to feelings of depression and can impact many areas of your life, such as relationships, work, or other activities.

For more tips on
dealing with other Hep
C symptoms visit
www.hcvadvocate.org

TIPS

Here are some tips to help you manage fatigue so that normal activities of daily life can be achieved without so much effort:

- Balance daily activities. Try not to overload your day, work at the time of day you feel best.
- If it takes you awhile to have energy in the morning, schedule appointments for later in the day.
- Have the commonly used items in your house at waist level so you don't have to bend and reach which takes more energy.
- Rather than trying to sleep when you are fatigued, try resting or doing an easier activity, as that actually gives you more energy. If you need to sleep make sure it is a nap that's no longer than 20 minutes.
- Pace yourself; give yourself regular breaks in your day.
- Prioritize your activities into what you need to do over what you think you have to do.
- Fatigue doesn't mean you shouldn't exercise; exercise can be energizing and invigorating.
- Avoid big heavy meals, eat smaller meals without rushing and give your body time to digest before any activity.
- Try not to have very hot showers, as this can be tiring.
- Try to establish a pre-sleep routine to make sure you are able to fall asleep and sleep well at night.
- Drink lots of water; avoid drinks that contain caffeine or sugar.
- Ask for help if you feel too tired.

One Person's Experience with Hep C Treatment

I found out I had Hep C about 4 years ago. I was starting methadone and they did blood work and the results showed that I had Hep C and that my viral load was way up. I was really upset when I found out cause I had no idea what Hep C was and I thought it meant I was gonna die. I was also angry cause I figure I got it from my friend who I shared a spoon with and he told me he didn't have Hep C, but I later found out he actually did. I went to talk to the doctor at the methadone clinic and he made me feel a bit better cause he told me that people can actually live for many years with Hep C, and sometimes not even feel any symptoms. The doctor asked me if I would be interested in getting treatment for my Hep C and I told him I would be, so he told me I had to be clean for at least 3 months before I could start it since you shouldn't use while you are on treatment. So I went on methadone and got clean and after 3 months I went to see the doctor again to see if my viral load was high enough to take the treatment and it was. I also found out that the type of Hep C that I had was the easiest one to treat so I would only have to be on treatment for 6 months. I was also able to get Ontario Works to pay for my treatment, which was great. They covered everything. I started my treatment and it consisted of 4 pills a day, 2 in the morning and 2 at night, as well as a weekly injection which I administered myself into my stomach. It was kind of hard because it felt like a lot of pills to be taking every day. All in all though, treatment wasn't too bad for me so I was lucky. I had heard that you can be really sick the whole time and bed ridden, and it wasn't that bad for me. I was really tired all the time, but I walked a lot and was always on the go so I think that helped my body accept it better than other people's would. Some other side effects I experienced while on treatment were a lot of weight loss, exhaustion, feeling very angry all the time and very sick to my stomach. The weight loss got pretty bad over time. When I started treatment I was 185 pounds and by the end of the 6 months I was 135. The doctor had me start taking Ensure to help with the weight loss and it did help me gain some weight back, as well as gave me more energy. By the time I stopped treatment I was back up to 145 pounds. Over the length of the treatment they kept checking my blood work and my viral load kept going down, which was good news. The very last blood work they did on me while I was on treatment showed that I had no viral load whatsoever and so it was decided that I had cleared the virus. At this point I still have to go in to get my blood checked every few months to make sure my viral load is still under control. But all in all my treatment was successful.

Hep C and Depression

Living with Hepatitis C (HCV) is a lifestyle change enough as it is, but having to go through depression, unfortunately, is a common side effect of HCV treatment. People who suffer from depression while taking treatment, have thoughts of suicide or self-harm, or have a family history of depression are encouraged to seek counselling and support services. There are various kinds of anti-depressant medications available, and studies have shown that these can help reduce depression that is associated with HCV treatment. If you are already on anti-depressants, it's important to remember to work closely with your healthcare provider who is knowledgeable about HCV treatment. Sometimes doctors will choose not to treat Hep C if previous depression is too severe.

Some signs of depression to look out for when taking medications that cause emotional shifts include fatigue, irritability, changes in eating or sleeping patterns (increase/decrease in appetite; increase/decrease in weight), mood swings (feeling sad, anxious, or "empty"; you may cry with no reasonable explanation), problems concentrating, feeling of hopelessness, guiltiness, worthlessness, helplessness, loss of interest or enjoyment in hobbies, social activities, or sex, and thoughts of death and/or suicide

It is very important to know that depression is very serious and can be life threatening.

There are several things you can do to take care of yourself when you are feeling depressed, such as getting support from family and/or friends, avoid or reduce the risk of stress, try to be physically active, get at least 8 hours of sleep, avoid alcohol and other non-prescribed substances, eat healthy foods, avoid isolation, balance activity with rest, find ways to laugh, and practice positive thinking. Counselling and support groups can help a person deal with these emotional changes and so can accessing a telephone support line.

See page 12 for more info on a Hep C support group offered by the AIDS Committee of London.

The Good and The Bad About Herbal Remedies and Supplements

Living with chronic Hepatitis C can be difficult, especially for those who are experiencing symptoms such as fatigue, upset stomach, and lack of appetite and food intolerances. Although there is much to be said about beefing up your diet (literally), sometimes that isn't possible and sometimes it isn't even appealing.

Dietary supplements and herbal remedies are products that can be helpful when dealing with symptoms associated with Hepatitis C. They can also be harmful. One of the biggest issues regarding these products is that they are not necessarily regulated, and are usually not dispensed by a trained professional. For example, anyone can shop in a drug store and pick up a number of different herbal products that all claim to help with fatigue - a major symptom of chronic Hepatitis C. But those products could be toxic to your liver.

What's Good...

In reality, there are very few supplements and herbal products that have been found to be beneficial to persons living with Hepatitis C. Likely this is not because they aren't out there, but because there just isn't a lot of research into non-pharmaceutical and dietary supplements that are proven to benefit those living with Hepatitis C. However, here are a few products that are supported in the literature:

- Vitamin D
- Vitamin C
- Multivitamins for seniors (without iron and niacin)
- Probiotic supplements containing
Lactobacillus acidophilus
- Licorice root
- Cinnamon

Here's a basic summary of common products that are known to **be harmful to your liver**

- Black cohosh
- Ephedra
- Ginkgo
- Indigo
- Iron
- Mistletoe
- Milk thistle
- Niacin
- Nutmeg
- Parsely seed
- Shark cartilage
- Sweet clover
- Vitamin A

There are many, many more herbal products that are hepatotoxic. For a full list refer to www.hcvadvocate.org or speak to a knowledgeable herbologist or pharmacist.

The bottom line is that there is no magic cure for your symptoms, but there are herbs and dietary supplements that can help make living with chronic Hepatitis C a bit easier.

*Authored by: Sue Tobin , Nurse Practitioner
London Intercommunity Health Centre*





HIV & HEP C CO-INFECTION



Approximately 10 000 people are co-infected with HIV and Hepatitis C (HCV) which means about 20% of people living with HIV are also living with HCV. As with any virus in the body, adding another one causes more complications for each virus. Being co-infected gives you a higher chance of developing cirrhosis more quickly, a greater risk for heart disease, as well you should be aware that liver disease from HCV is the leading cause of death among people who are co-infected. Therefore, if you are co-infected with HIV and HCV, protecting your liver is very important. It is a vital organ in your body because it performs over 500 functions such as processing vitamins and minerals and filtering your blood. Everything you eat, drink, rub on your skin, or ingest in any way goes through your liver. Protecting your immune system is important, too. It helps you fight off disease and allows you stay healthy. If you are co-infected, there are some ways you can protect your liver and your immune system. Some ideas are to eat healthy, nutritious food, get lots of sleep and exercise (if you cannot sleep for long periods of time, naps are great!), avoid alcohol and other non-prescribed substances (they will damage your liver more), drink lots of water, try your best to quit smoking, get vaccinated for Hepatitis A and B, inform your doctor of any other medications you are on (prescribed or not, and also herbs and supplements, because they may interfere with treatment), and always protect yourself from re-infection of other strains of HIV or HCV.

Some important interactions between these two viruses are that HIV increases the chances of transmitting HCV through two routes – childbirth and unprotected sex.

If a mother who is co-infected gives birth to a baby, there is a higher chance of transmitting HCV to the baby, then if she was only infected with HCV. In addition, the risk of sexual transmission of HCV is low but can greatly increase with the presence of sexually transmitted infections, HIV, menstruation or through certain sex practices, including rough sex, fisting, group sex, or sex with multiple partners. When it comes to any form of risky behaviour, remember to always protect yourself and others, especially if you know you are infected. If you use drugs, never share or re-use your equipment (always get new equipment), practice safe sex by using condoms, lube, dental dams (etc), practice safe tattooing and piercing by always using new equipment (this includes any needles, gloves, jewellery, ink pots, etc – HCV can live here too!), and never share razors, toothbrushes, nail clippers, or any other piece of equipment that may come into contact with contaminated blood.

If you are at all concerned that you may have HIV, HCV or both, remember to get tested. It is simple – you can head down to the Sexually Transmitted Infections Clinic at the Middlesex-London Health Unit. You do not need an appointment or a health card – it is just first-come, first-served. If you would like to contact the office, the number is: **(519) 663 – 5446**. In addition to getting tested, remember that for HCV, you will need to go back in for additional testing to see if your body has spontaneously removed the virus on its own, or if you will need to look into further options, such as treatment.

Stay safe, stay protected, and get tested!

Transmission of Hep C

Risk Behavior (through blood-to-blood contact)	Prevention
HIGH RISK	
Sharing needles—of any kind	New needles every time
Sharing drug use equipment—cookers, ties, filters, alcohol wipes, water, crack pipes, straws, bills	Everything new every time
Tattooing done with non-sterilized or re-used equipment	New needles, ink, gloves, wipe clothes when tattooing
Practices and rituals that involve cutting	Cover wounds, avoid sharing sharps
Blood transfusions or blood products (before-1992)	If you have received blood or blood products pre-1992, consider getting tested
LOW RISK	
Sharing personal items—razor, nail clipper, toothbrush, manicure tools	Have your own razors, toothbrushes, and manicure tools
Sex	Use a condom or dental dam every time
Mother-to-child transmission	*This is rare

ACTIVITIES THAT POSE NO RISK:

- Hugging, kissing
- Day-to-day contact with family or friends
- Using public bathrooms

Coverage for Hep C Health Care & Treatment

The **Ontario Drug Benefits (ODB) Plan** has a special application form for the client and doctor to fill out to cover costs for Peg-Interferon and Ribavirin

- In Ontario, one can get ODB if he/she is on Ontario Works or the Ontario Disability Support Program or if he/she is on the Trillium Drug Program. ODB is also available for people over the age of 65.
- The client's doctor or nurse will need to complete Section 16: Individual Clinical Review so the client can access the Hep C medications for treatment.

Ontario's Trillium Drug Program

- If a client has high drug costs relative to his/her income, he/she may be able to get assistance from the Trillium Drug Program. This program charges a deductible of 4% of the individual's annual net income and is paid in four installments.

Provincial Healthcare

- Health cards are from the Ontario Health Insurance Plan (OHIP), which cover the cost of doctor visits and blood tests related to Hep C (diagnosis tests, monitoring tests, and treatment success tests)

Dead Space

The Risk of Transmission Through 3cc Syringes

When a syringes plunger is fully depressed or pushed closed blood or fluids will still be in the barrel of the syringe. The space at the front of the syringe where that blood or fluid will sit is called dead space. The more dead space a syringe has the more blood or fluids can be in that space which leads to a greater risk of HIV or Hepatitis C being in the syringe and being injected into someone if the syringe was to be shared.

At the recent International AIDS Conference in Vienna research was presented regarding dead space and HIV transmission. Data from multi-year HIV prevalence studies were gathered from 35 cities in 20 countries and the local needle exchanges were contacted to find out what varieties of syringes they distributed. In cities where high "dead space" syringes were mainly used, the average HIV prevalence among injection drug users was 32.6%. In cities where low "dead space" syringes were mainly used, the average was just 1.4%. When the data was analyzed, the type of syringe was the only consistent factor closely associated with this pattern.

That study is in regards to HIV only but we know that Hepatitis C lives longer outside of the body and even longer in syringes. If HIV can be spread easier using syringes with high dead space volume then so can Hepatitis C. Syringes with high dead space volume generally are the syringes with replaceable tips such as the 3cc syringes we give out through Counterpoint Harm Reduction Services. Workers at Counterpoint have already noticed that people often tend to take many more replaceable tips for 3cc syringes than they do the 3cc syringes themselves. We are also aware that people often think they are safe if they replace the tip of the needle that actually punctures the skin and are much more likely to share and reuse 3cc syringes. This can lead to increased rates of bacterial infection (abscesses) and we now know that it is actually more likely to transmit HIV or Hepatitis C because the dead space is in the barrel of the syringe.

If you use or know people who use 3cc syringes please spread the message and help educate people about the increased risk of sharing and reusing the larger 3cc syringes as opposed to the smaller 1cc and $\frac{1}{2}$ cc syringes available at Counterpoint. And remember it is best to take an equal number of 3cc syringes and replaceable tips.



*By: Nick Scrivo
IDU Outreach Worker*



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
519-679-9570

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

Look for more info about Hep C at
www.infohepatitec.ca



'C' Life

HEPATITIS C – PEER SUPPORT GROUP

First Tuesday of every month, at 7 - 9 p.m.

EVERYONE WHO IS INFECTED OR AFFECTED WITH HEPATITIS C ARE WELCOME!

Here at the AIDS COMMITTEE – Follow the signs up the stairs!
Refreshments will be provided.

For more information, please contact:

Nicole Elliott

Harm Reduction/Hepatitis C Peer Support Worker

Tel: 519.434.1601 ext. 260

Cell: 519.636.4516



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