



Regional
HIV/AIDS
Connection

Community Inspired. Courage Driven.

HEP C NEWS

Winter Edition 2011

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Regional HIV/AIDS Connection has been providing Hep C education & support for 2 years . We strive to educate community members, clients, and service providers about Hep C transmission in order to lessen the spread of the virus. We also work with people living with and affected by Hep C to support them in whatever way they need. We encourage anyone who has a question or concern regarding Hep C to stop by our agency and we would be happy to help you out!

**Want to
contact us?**

**Regional HIV/AIDS
Connection**

#30-186 King Street

London, Ontario

N6A 1C7

519-434-1601

New Support Services Available!

If you're thinking about getting support for your Hep C, Regional HIV/AIDS Connection (RHAC) is a great place to start. RHAC currently provides a number of services that you may already know about, like one-on-one counseling, referral and advocacy or our monthly Hep C support group. In addition to those services, we're very excited to tell you about some of our newer initiatives. We're also able to provide:

- Intake and assessment
- Treatment information
- Practical assistance – bus tickets, transportation to medical appointments, country cupboard food bank, annual holiday dinner
- Wellness Assistance Fund – *available to clients with Hep C who are residents of John Gordon Home
- Lunch and Learns
- Assistance with OW, ODSP, housing, trillium, CPP & any other relevant benefits

For more information about any of our services, call and ask for Sarah Wood, Hep C Educator & Support Worker.



FAQ:**Where do I go to get tested?**

You can get tested for Hep C at your family doctors or a walk-in clinic. If you do not have a steady health care provider or are more comfortable going somewhere else you can visit:

InterCommunity Health Centre

659 Dundas Street (519-660-0874)

or

Middlesex-London Health Unit

50 King Street (519-663-5317)

FAQ:**How does testing work?**

The first test you get done is a blood test called the antibody test. This test tells you if your body has ever been exposed to the Hep C virus. If this test comes back positive then you need to get a second blood test done, called the RNA test.

The RNA test checks to see if the virus is still active in your body. Health care providers can also check things like your viral load and your genotype with this test.

So remember, you need to have TWO levels of testing done to be diagnosed with Hep C.

FAQ:**What are some effects of a sick liver?**

Having an unhealthy liver can result in many different effects, some you may not even realize are caused by that.

Here are some examples:

- Nausea and vomiting
- Extreme fatigue
- Jaundice
- Loss of appetite and difficulty eating
- Weight loss
- Fluid build up in your limbs and stomach
- Dental problems
- Confusion and loss of memory
- Possibility of coma

FAQ's & Myths About Hep C

Myth:**I can get treatment any time I want.**

This is not necessarily true. There are long waits to get in to see the Hep C specialists in the city, and once you see a specialist there is a lot to do before you can begin treatment, if you are deemed a good candidate. There are many tests to complete first as well as a lot of paperwork to submit regarding paying for treatment.

What this means is that if you are considering treatment you should begin the process as soon as possible to increase your chances of beginning treatment at the earliest available time.

Myth:**I cannot get Hep C from a tattoo, only from injecting drugs.**

Getting a tattoo or piercing with non-sterilized materials is actually very high risk for transmission of Hep C. Also, it's not only the tattooing needle that carries blood, blood can live on the needles, the guns, and in the ink. So sharing any of these materials can result in the spread of Hep C.

It is important to ensure that the artist who is doing your tattoo is using all new or sterilized equipment.

Myth:**You cannot go on treatment while on methadone.**

There is a lot of worry that methadone is damaging to the liver and therefore dangerous for people with Hep C, but this is not entirely true. Methadone is actually safe for the liver and does not cause increased damage.

Therefore it is safe to take Hep C treatment medications while on methadone.

A Peer Experience

The Fog

*The day that the fog began to clear
The destruction, self loathing, anxiety and fear
Faced with the question of why I'm still here
For the first time in years I cried my first tear
In its wake all the wreckage a disease did create
None of which I intended to pre-meditate
Of the pit I'd been digging at the bottom I stood
Until someone suggested that I change what I could
And as well to accept what it is I can not
I have a disease
But my cure can be taught*

A sonnet by: Trenton Lee Burke

When your health care provider gives you your **VIRAL LOAD** do you ever wonder what that means? Your viral load is the amount of the Hep C virus that you have in your blood.

And how do you know if your viral load is high or low? Well there is no definite answer and it depends on the person and their situation, but a general standard is:

Under 800,000 IU/mL is considered a low viral load

Over 800,000 IU/mL is considered a medium to high viral load

Advocating For Your Own Hep C Care

- **Believe in yourself**- One of the first steps around advocating for yourself is to believe that you can make a difference.
- **Decide what you want or what needs to change**- Make a plan for yourself, including what steps need to be taken to complete that plan. This makes it seem less overwhelming and more achievable.
- **Be prepared**- Know your rights! You have the right to ask questions and understand what is going on with your health. Also plan ahead how you're going to present the message. Think about what will be the most effective way to get the message across to the person you are trying to communicate with. Example, through a letter, in person, phone-call. Make sure to keep notes with you if you are having trouble remembering any points. This will ensure you are covering all that you want to discuss.
- **Learn to negotiate**- You may not get exactly what you are looking for but learning to negotiate can help both parties achieve a win-win solution. This can be done with health care providers, social workers, friends, family, etc.
- **Take care of yourself**- Be sure to put your health first. Do not get overwhelmed trying to deal with your Hep C, make sure to not to overdo it. Having extra support through this can help relieve unnecessary stress.

Remember: You are the only person who knows what your needs are. You are the expert about your life, so keep this in mind when you are trying to get the care you require for your Hep C.

Healthy Liver



What does the liver do?

- largest organ in your body
- located on the right side of the body below your ribcage
- it filters everything you eat and breathe including the things that get on your skin
- makes and stores energy and nutrients from the foods you eat
- helps the body clear out harmful things such as drugs and alcohol
- makes proteins that help your blood clot when you are bleeding
- makes hormones for your body
- makes sure your body remains healthy and prevents you from becoming sick
- is a “non-complaining organ” meaning if the liver is damaged you may not know it
- Keeps you alive, you can’t live without a working liver

What does a healthy liver look like?

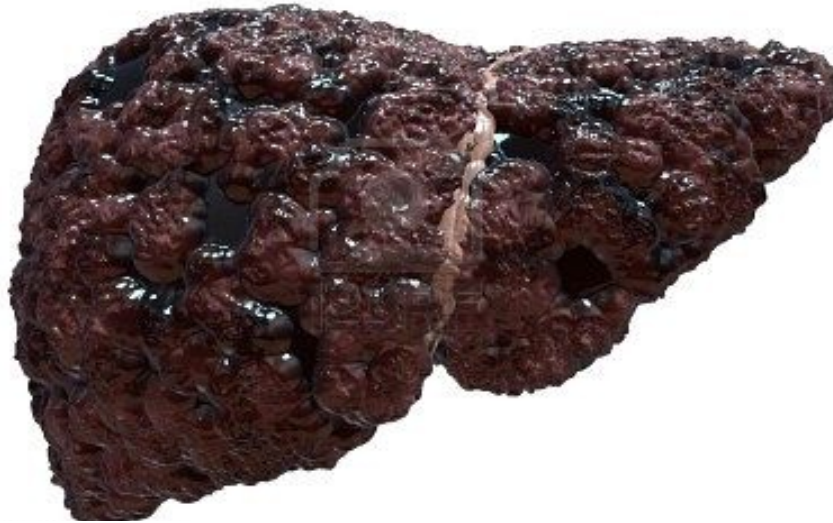
- soft and smooth surface
- reddish-brown colour
- no scarring

How to prevent liver cirrhosis:

- reduce alcohol intake
- reduce salt intake
- get vaccinated against Hepatitis A & B
- try not to take aspirin, sleeping pills, sedatives or cough syrups with codeine unless discussed with your doctor
- use gloves and wear a face mask when using cleaning products

Unhealthy Liver

(Cirrhosis)



What is cirrhosis?

- can be caused by a hepatitis infection or other things like alcohol and street drugs
- is the replacement of healthy liver tissue with non-functioning scar tissue
- scarring leads to a blockage of blood flow through the liver until the liver loses its ability to function
- weakens your immune system (you can get sick easier)
- is a potentially life threatening condition

What does an unhealthy liver look like?

- swelling or shrinkage will happen
- scarred and hard surface

Effects of an unhealthy liver:

- fatigue or weakness
- loss of appetite
- nausea
- weight loss
- red, spider-shaped blood vessels under your skin jaundice
- fluid build-up and painful swelling of the legs and abdomen
- confusion and other mental changes, possibly leading to coma



Nutrition & Hep C

what to eat and what to avoid



What kind of diet should be followed is a common concern for people with Hepatitis C. The general answer is that you should try to eat a relatively healthy diet. The detailed answer is that if you have moderate liver damage you do not need to be as strict with your diet, but you should still try and eat a balanced diet that doesn't include a lot of harmful foods. If you have serious liver damage (cirrhosis) then you should monitor quite closely the foods you are eating so as to not cause further damage to your liver.

Generally, someone with Hep C should try to eat a diet that is low in fat, with plenty of vegetables, fruits and whole grains. This should include trying to eat foods that are low in sodium, iron and simple sugars and high in protein, particularly if you have cirrhosis.

Fat:

The liver is responsible for digesting fats and it has difficulty doing this when there is liver damage, so you should **try to be careful with your fat intake**. You do not necessarily want to cut all fats and oils out of your diet because some are needed by your body for it to function properly, but you should try to eat reduced fat foods, including dairy products, and lean meats with the fat trimmed off. It is important to avoid processed foods high in saturated or trans fats. Omega-3 fatty acids should be the main type of fat that you eat. Salmon, walnuts, flaxseed and fish oil are great sources of Omega-3.

Sodium:

Too much sodium (salt) is very damaging to the liver. If you have cirrhosis a high salt diet can lead to ascites, which is when there is an abnormal accumulation of fluids in the abdomen. People often are not aware of just how much sodium there is in different foods, so some foods that should be avoided are canned soups, crackers, tomato sauce, and soy sauce, just to name a few. It is very important to get into the habit of reading labels at the store to see how much sodium is contained in the food. Limiting salt also means that fast food should be avoided as well as processed food. Red meat should also be restricted because it is high in sodium.

Iron:

The liver is responsible for metabolizing iron as it is the primary organ in the body for storing this metal. People with Hep C can sometimes have trouble getting this iron out of the body and this can result in an overload of iron in the liver, blood, and other organs. **Excess iron in the liver can be very damaging.** This is not to say that you should eliminate iron rich foods, such as red meat, entirely. Just make sure that you are eating small portions with the fat removed. Other foods high in iron that you will want to watch out for are liver and cereals fortified with iron. Studies have also found that high iron levels are particularly harmful to people with Hep C who are undergoing treatment, as it can decrease the response rates to the drug Interferon.

Sugar:

It is important to **try to avoid eating too much sugar or to avoid becoming overweight** when you have Hep C. Sugars are sources of energy, thus can be very tempting to eat, but they are not a source of essential nutrients. It is much better for you to get your energy from foods like whole grains, meats, fruits, cereals, and vegetables, which are all rich in nutrients.

Protein:

Protein is a very important thing for someone with Hep C to have in their body as it helps to repair body tissues, and this includes liver tissues. People with liver damage or cirrhosis should ingest an adequate amount of protein. You do not want to go overboard and eat too much as too much protein can cause other health complications with your Hep C. It is recommended to take proteins from vegetables, such as beans and lentils, and dairy products, such as eggs, milk, and yogurt, instead of from meat. If you are getting some of your protein from animal products you will want to ensure that you monitor the amount you are eating.

CHICKEN DIJON High Protein Recipe

Ingredients:

- 1 1/2 lbs. boneless, skinless chicken breasts
- 1 Tbsp Dijon mustard
- Water
- 1 Tbsp butter
- 1 Tbsp flour
- Salt and pepper to taste

Cover the chicken with water and bring to a slow boil in a covered pot. Cook for six minutes or until done. Reserve 1 cup liquid. Melt butter in a saucepan over medium heat. Add flour and stir constantly until mixture turns brown. Add 1 cup reserved liquid, then stir for four more minutes until sauce thickens. Add mustard; stir until smooth. Pour over chicken and serve

CURRIED SNACK MIX Low Sodium Recipe

Ingredients:

- 3 plain rice cakes, broken into bite-sized pieces
- 1 cup bite size square corn cereal or oyster crackers
- 3/4 cup pretzel sticks, halved
- 1 Tbsp margarine, melted
- 1 Tsp Worcestershire sauce
- 1/2 to 3/4 teaspoon curry powder

In a 13x9x2 inch baking pan stir together brown rice cakes, corn cereal or oyster crackers, and pretzels. In a small bowl stir together melted margarine, Worcestershire sauce, and curry powder. Drizzle margarine mixture over cereal mixture. Toss until coated. Bake in oven at 300 degrees for 20 minutes, stirring twice. Cool about 30 minutes before serving. If desired, store cooled mixture in a tightly covered container up to 3 days.

The internet is a great place to find tons of delicious, free recipes!



Hep C Friendly

RECIPES

SPANISH RICE

Low Sodium Recipe

Ingredients:

- 1 can low salt chicken broth
- 1 cup white rice
- 1/2 cup chopped tomatoes
- 1/2 cup chopped green pepper
- 1 Tbsp margarine
- 2 Tbsp low salt tomato sauce
- Chili powder
- Cumin
- Jalapeno pepper (optional)

Boil low salt chicken broth. Add rice. In frying pan with margarine, sauté tomatoes and green pepper. When the rice is done put it into the frying pan. Add tomato sauce and 1/2 cup chicken broth that the rice was cooked in, as well as chili powder, cumin and jalapeno. Simmer on low heat for 20 minutes until flavor can be tasted in the rice.

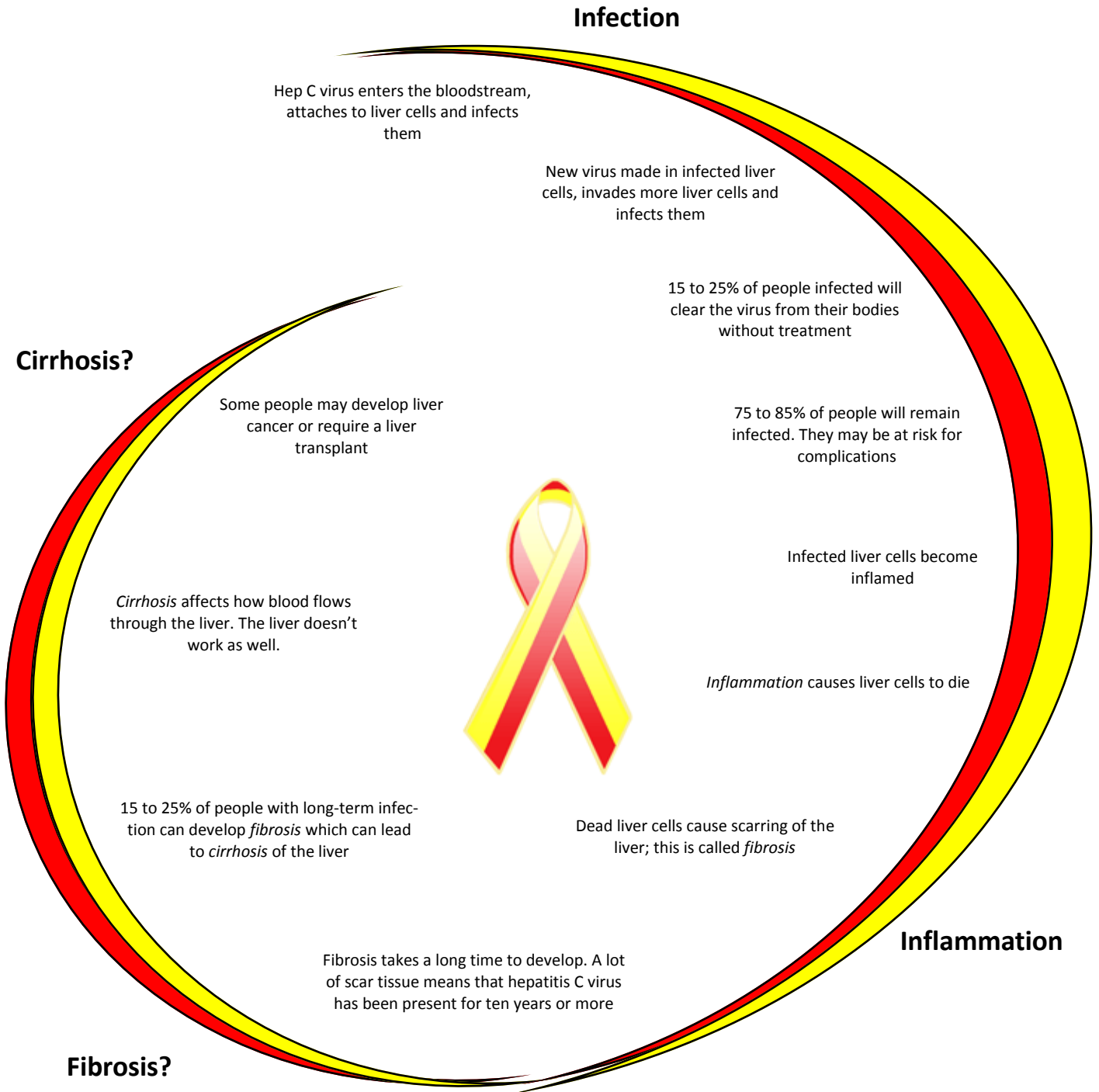
Feeling Nauseous?

Hep C can make people feel sick to their stomach (nausea), which can affect appetite. Although there is usually no vomiting it can be very uncomfortable.

Here are some tips of how to deal with nausea:

- try avoiding large or high-fat meals for a period of time to see if this has any impact
- if cooking smells make you feel ill, avoid them by microwaving previously prepared and frozen meals
- yogurt, vitamin b6 and chamomile tea may help to reduce nausea. Ginger may also help so try fresh ginger with meals, ginger tablets, or ginger tea.
- eat bitter foods (e.g. olives, rocket lettuce) before main meals to improve digestion
- avoid drinking fluids during meals and do not lie down within 30 minutes of eating

What can happen after a person is infected with hepatitis C virus?



Possible Predictors of Treatment Success

When one receives a Hepatitis C diagnosis it is common for one of the first thoughts to be ‘can I receive treatment?’. The answer to this is yes there is treatment out there, but there is also a lot you will want to consider when deciding if it is right for you or not.

There are many factors that affect a successful treatment outcome and we will discuss some of them here. However, when looking at predictors of treatment response, make sure to use them as something to consider in the decision making process, rather than something to discourage you from choosing to undergo treatment. Also, keep in mind that even if treatment is not able to eliminate the Hep C virus in your blood, there are still benefits to it, such as reducing liver inflammation, reversing liver damage, and slowing down disease progression.

Genotype:

The most important predictor of a successful treatment and also dictates the length of treatment. People with genotype 1 have about a 40-50% chance of treatment success, and people with genotypes 2 or 3 have about a 70-85% chance of success.

HCV RNA or Viral Load:

Viral load is the amount of the Hep C virus that you have in your blood and is an important determinant of treatment response. The lower the HCV RNA (viral load) the better the chance of eliminating the Hepatitis C virus.

Disease Severity:

The more damaged or scarred the liver the less likely it is that treatment will be successful.

Gender:

Generally, women seem to respond better to Hep C treatment medications than men.

Race:

Generally, Asians tend to have the highest response rates to Hep C medications, followed by Caucasians and African Americans.

Age:

Generally, people under 40 years old respond better to treatment than people over 40 years old. The immune system of someone younger is more intact and better able to help fight Hep C. Also, the longer someone has Hep C the more it can replicate and cause damage.

Obesity:

Studies have found that people who are obese do not respond as well to HCV medications as those who are at a healthy weight.

Alcohol:

People who drink alcohol while undergoing Hep C treatment have a lower chance of being successful at it.

Pregnancy & Hep C



While having Hepatitis C and being pregnant does not pose much risk for the mother or the fetus, it does pose a concern when it comes to treatment as well as breastfeeding.

Ribavirin Therapy & Pregnancy- Both women and men are advised to stop Hep C treatment if they, or their partners, are planning on becoming pregnant. When taking Ribavirin two forms of birth control must be used, and for up to 6 months post-therapy (after treatment has stopped), because that is how long it takes the drug to be eliminated from the body. For female patients on Ribavirin a negative pregnancy test is required each month to continue treatment. Ribavirin is known to cause harm to a developing fetus (birth defects and fetal death) when taken while pregnant, and male patients whose female partners are pregnant are also asked to stop treatment because there may be risk of transference through sperm.

Birth & Breastfeeding- The risk of transmission of Hep C from mother to child is very small (approx. 5%), but if the mother is co-infected (HIV/HCV) then the risk of passing Hep C can be up to 19%. It is advised to not breastfeed if currently taking Ribavirin because although there is no proof, most drugs can be passed through breast milk. A baby born to a mother with Hep C is usually tested for Hep C after 18 month because it takes that long to clear out their mothers antibodies.

Pregnancy & the Liver- When a woman who has Hep C is pregnant some studies show that ALT enzymes (ALT enzymes suggest liver damage) decrease during the last trimester, but can increase again after delivery due to the fact pregnancy may alter immune activity.

For any questions about pregnancy and Hep C talk to your health care provider.

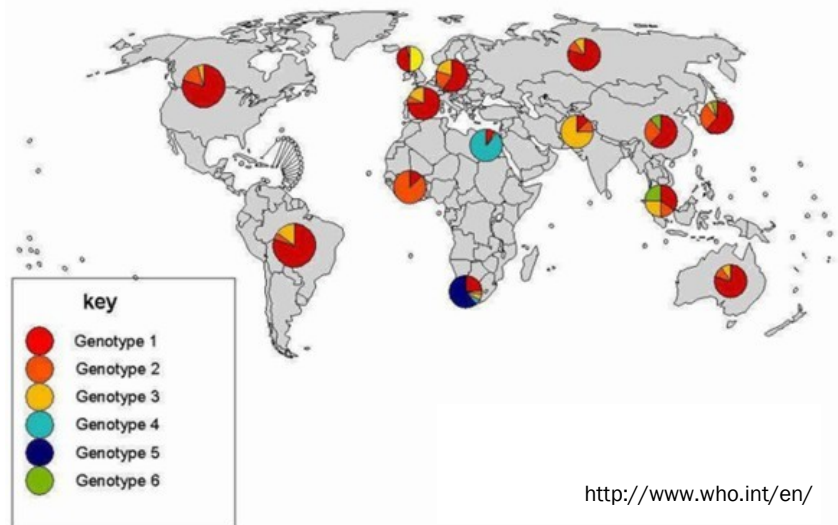


Genotypes

My Hepatitis C is the same as someone else's Hepatitis C right? No actually. There is more than one different type of Hep C and not everyone with it has the same kind. There are actually six different kinds of Hep C and these are called genotypes and are numbered from 1 to 6. Not only are there 6 different genotypes but some genotypes are further divided into subtypes (so someone could have genotype 1a and someone else could have genotype 1b).

To find out your genotype you will need to have a blood test done. It is important to know that you can get MORE THAN ONE different type of Hep C (genotypes) at once and that will increase your chances of liver damage. So this means that even if you have Hep C you still need to take precautions to protect yourself.

Global distribution of HCV genotypes



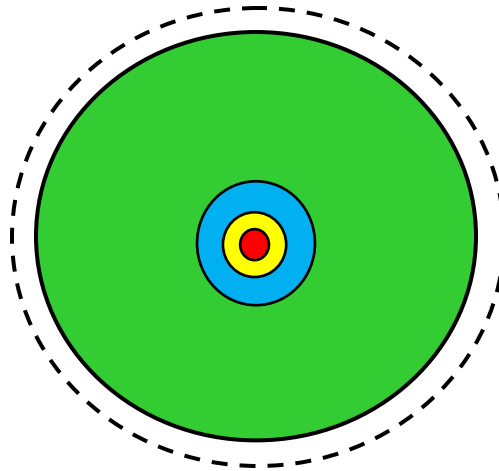
<http://www.who.int/en/>

Genotypes 1, 2, and 3 are most common in Canada

Alcohol & Hep C

A common message for people living with Hep C is to avoid or cut back on alcohol consumption. The reasoning for this is because drinking with Hepatitis C can accelerate the scarring of the liver which would lead to cirrhosis of the liver, a very serious liver disease. Individuals with Hepatitis C who drink lightly or do not drink at all usually only progress to moderate liver scarring and that can be up to 40 years after infection. Those who have Hep C and are heavy drinkers (5+ drinks a day) can develop twice as much scarring within 25 years after infection than those with Hep C who are light to non-drinkers, but after 40 years of continued drinking, whether moderate or heavy, most individuals will develop cirrhosis.

<http://www.hepatitis.va.gov/>



Chance of Getting Cirrhosis

- **Non-Drinker without Hepatitis C**
- **Non-Drinker with Hepatitis C** (9 times more likely than Non-Drinker no Hep C)
- **Drinker without Hepatitis C** (15 times more likely than Non-Drinker no Hep C)
- **Drinker with Hepatitis C** (147 times more likely than Non-Drinker without Hep C)

● ● ● ● ● Methadone & Hepatitis C

It is very common for people who take methadone to also have Hepatitis C; some reports say that as many as 9 out of 10 people who are on methadone are also Hep C positive. There is a lot of worry that methadone is damaging to the liver and therefore dangerous for people with Hep C, but this is not entirely true. Methadone is actually safe for the liver and does not cause increased damage. Where methadone can be hard on the liver is if the liver is so damaged that it is not able to handle the methadone, but this can be managed by working closely with the doctor to ensure that the amount of methadone you are taking is safe for your liver condition. The other misconception is that a person cannot receive treatment for Hep C while they are on methadone, and this is also untrue. It is safe to take Hep C treatment medications while on methadone.



Why Join a Peer Support Group?

Finding out you have Hep C, coping with side effects of the virus, the isolation that can go along with it, considering or undergoing treatment, are all difficult things that a person with Hep C has to deal with. Dealing with them alone can make it even more difficult and that is why many people seek out the help of a peer support group. A peer support group is a group of people going through similar experiences who meet regularly. Peer support can play an important role for people living with Hep C because it can help you cope with the physical, mental, and emotional changes that can result from having the virus. Group members who have been through, or are going through, a similar experience can not only sympathize with you, but they can really relate to what you are going through and make you feel like you are not alone. Peer support groups are not only beneficial to the person living with Hepatitis C but to their friends and family as well, as they can meet other people who are familiar with their experience.

What can a peer support group do for me?

- Help reduce feelings of depression and fear
- Provide an opportunity to share medical information, get confirmation that their feelings are “normal, educate others, or just let off steam
- Break down feelings of isolation and help link you to needed resources
- Provide a place to exchange both emotional and practical support, as well as to exchange information
- Help you understand what is happening to your body and to develop positive ways to deal with these changes
- Provide you with access to practical tips and resources
- Connect you with people who can give you advice and encouragement to help you effectively make decisions surrounding the virus and to help you successfully live with the disease



‘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 REGIONAL HIV/AIDS CONNECTION
Follow the signs up the stairs!**

Snacks & refreshments will be provided.

For more information, please contact:

Tel: 519.434.1601



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Production of this information piece has been made possible through a financial contribution from the Public Health Agency of Canada.
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