

HEP C NEWS

Summer 2012 Edition

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Regional HIV/AIDS Connection has been providing hep C education and support for almost 3 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 with whatever 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!



Regional
HIV/AIDS
Connection

Community Inspired. Courage Driven.

DID YOU KNOW?

- There is some risk for hepatitis C transmission when sharing household items such as a toothbrush, razors and nail clippers.
- Both an antibody test and an RNA test need to be done to diagnose someone as having hepatitis C.
- Once exposed to hepatitis c, you will always test positive for antibodies, even after clearing the virus.
- About 1/3 of people currently living with hepatitis C don't know that they are infected.
- You can become re-infected with hepatitis C after clearing the virus?
- Genotype 1 is the most common genotype in North America.
- 3,200-5,000 people are newly infected with hepatitis C each year in Canada.
- Many people don't have any symptoms for years while living with hepatitis C

**Want to know more
about hepatitis C?
Contact Regional
HIV/AIDS
Connection to
arrange a
presentation!**

HEPATITIS C PEER SOCIAL

The Hep C Peer Social is an informal group that meets every Thursday from 2 -4 pm at Regional HIV/AIDS Connection. It is composed of people who have or are affected by hepatitis C. It is a drop in event and there is no sign up to attend. We usually have fresh fruit, veggies and juice to snack on. The group connects folks to others who have or are affected by hepatitis C. It is peer support of the best kind. There is no structured sharing or topics. We just get together and talk about whatever we feel the need to discuss. In the group people also share tips on how they got through some of the difficulties they have faced. The level of understanding and compassion shown is unparalleled. When peers share their experience, strength and hope, they help others in a way that is just not possible without that lived experience. The folks who frequent the hepatitis C Peer Social are very happy with the group. Many have said they look forward to coming every week and connecting with their peers. We also have outings 4 times a year. Those outings may include dinner and a movie, an old fashioned picnic in the park, or a trip to the museum. If you or anyone you know is affected by hepatitis C feel free to drop by on Thursdays between 2-4pm.

By: Keri Wheatley, Hepatitis C Peer Support Worker

MYTHS ABOUT HEP C TRANSMISSION

By: Karen Burton, Needle and Syringe Program Coordinator

Myth 1: Hepatitis C Is an STI

A sexually transmitted Infection (STI) is a disease that is spread by having sex. Hepatitis C is a disease of the liver, not of the sexual organs. While it is technically possible to spread hepatitis C by having sex, this doesn't happen very often, and it only happens through direct contact of infected blood.

Myth 2: You've been Vaccinated for Hepatitis C

There is a vaccine for hepatitis A and B, but not for hepatitis C. Hepatitis C currently infects about 170 million people worldwide, so a vaccine would great. The good news is that scientists are working on developing a hepatitis C vaccine.

Myth 3: Hepatitis A Leads to Hepatitis B, Which Then Leads to Hepatitis C

There are five hepatitis viruses named after a letter: A, B, C, D and E. Each one is a separate virus that causes a distinct disease. If someone had hepatitis A and now has hepatitis C, they were infected with two different viruses. One virus doesn't change into another virus. In fact, the viruses differ in structure, exposure, and disease. They do have one thing in common, however, they all infect the liver.

Myth 4: People with Hepatitis C Use Drugs

Just as one can't generalize a link between having hepatitis C and being an alcoholic, it is untrue that everyone with the disease is a substance user. Using drugs is a risk factor for exposure to viral hepatitis, approximately half of new infections are substance users.

Myth 5: Alcohol Causes Hepatitis C

Hepatitis C is caused by the hepatitis C virus, not by drinking alcohol. There is a different type of hepatitis called alcoholic hepatitis that is linked with drinking alcohol, but it's a very complex association. Someone who drinks alcohol in moderation might develop alcoholic hepatitis, while very few people who drink excessive amounts might develop alcoholic hepatitis. The confusion could be that chronic hepatitis, regardless of the cause, often leads to the same complication – cirrhosis, which could lead to liver failure. While the results can be similar, the causes are very different.

WHAT TO KNOW BEFORE BODY MODIFICATION

New tattoos and piercings are a direct entry into the bloodstream and can put you at risk of hepatitis C transmission, as well as other blood-borne pathogens if proper precautions are not taken. Getting a tattoo or piercing in a reputable, professional setting is the best way to reduce risk.

Before getting a tattoo or piercing, the artist should be willing to answer your questions and explain the procedure. Needles should always be new with each client. Other equipment used may be new or sterilized in an autoclave. The shop should have record of spore tests done in their autoclave. Ink and ink pots should also be new with each session. The artist should wear vinyl or latex gloves and should put on a new pair after any breaks. Client chairs, arm rests and work areas should be sprayed down with a medical grade surface disinfectant between clients.

After getting a tattoo or piercing, the shop should have after-care instructions for you to follow. Ensure that anything that comes into contact with a

healing tattoo or piercing is clean; this includes your hands, clothing and other surfaces. If a new tattoo or piercing becomes infected, talk to your doctor.



For a tattoo, you should leave the bandage on for 4-6 hours. After removing the bandage, wash your tattoo with a mild soap or cleanser, such as Spectro Jel. Apply an unscented body lotion, such as Aveeno, to the tattoo 2-3 times per day when it becomes dry and flaky. Do not pick or scratch a healing tattoo. Do not soak your tattoo in water while it is healing, this includes pools, hot-tubs and beaches. Healing tattoos must also be kept out of direct sunlight. Once healed, sunscreen can be used when the tattoo is in sunlight.

After getting a new piercing, wash it twice a day with a mild soap, such as Spectro Jel for the first 2 weeks and

continue washing the piercing once a day after that. To wash, first remove crusty matter with a clean cotton swab and warm water, then clean the piercing, jewellery and surrounding skin with a fresh cotton swab and soap. Be sure to rinse thoroughly after washing. To wash an oral piercing, rinse out your mouth using salt water or a non-alcohol based mouthwash every time you eat or drink for the first two weeks. Do not expose a piercing to anyone's saliva or body fluid until it is fully healed. Although hepatitis C is only transmitted through blood-to-blood contact, there are other pathogens that can pass through saliva and other bodily fluids.

Following these tips will help you have a safe and enjoyable experience getting your new tattoo or piercing.

By: Zach Templeman
Hepatitis C Educator



STAYING HEALTHY WITH HEPATITIS C

Right now is a great time to start thinking about your health! Remember health isn't an all or nothing thing; it's a process. Whether you're exploring treatment, changing your lifestyle, being more careful, or all of the above, here are a few tips for living well with hep C:

- Get the hep 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.
- Exercise regularly to keep you fit and give you energy.
- Rest when you're tired.
- Eat a healthy and balanced diet that includes lots of fruits and vegetables.
- Drink 6 to 8 glasses of water every day.
- Try not to worry too much.
- Practice safer sex.
- Maintain friendships and social contacts.
- Join a hep C support group.

By: Sheila Coad

Director of Harm Reduction Services



WORLD HEPATITIS DAY: JULY 28, 2012

World Hepatitis Day was created to improve awareness and education about hepatitis B and hepatitis C viruses. This day encourages those who may be at risk of transmission to get tested by striving to influence an increase in access to testing and treatment. The event attempts to prevent new infections and improve the treatment outcomes for those who are currently infected. Watch for a hepatitis C resource that will be distributed for World Hepatitis Day through the London libraries. For more information, visit www.whdcanada.ca.

Have you gotten a tattoo/piercing in a non-certified shop or at home?

Have you ever shared drug use equipment?

Have you shared personal hygiene items?

If so, you may have come in contact with the hepatitis C virus.

Getting tested is the only way to know for sure!

PERSONAL ACCOUNT

Describe your first encounter with RHAC

The first time I connected was actually because a friend needed help in one of the regions surrounding London and one of the case managers went to see her. I was impressed that she would travel that far to provide help. I thought, there must be something to this place. I was walking aimlessly one day by this place and remembered this is where Miriam came from. I walked through the door to see what it was all about and met with Sarah Wood (Hep C Educator). It wasn't so much what she was saying; it was more that here was a total stranger who actually cared. After talking with Sarah, the case managers, and other staff members, I've had a lot of life changes.

What would you say has changed for you since being connected to RHAC?

I used to consider myself a throw away and now I think more in terms of "I matter." I don't feel I have to be a burden to society, which is how I felt, I and can be a contributing member. Again, it's not so much the words people say to me here, it's that they remember who I am, they make an effort to get past the barriers that I've put up for myself. They ask "How are you?" and then actually wait for an answer.

I find that I'm learning to open up more, and be more involved in things I wouldn't be involved with before, like the needle recovery team. I'm learning to be a productive member of society. If this place wasn't here, I feel I'd be either in jail or six feet under. For the first time in my life I have hope. I figure, if you guys care so much about me, maybe there is something worth caring about.

"For the first time in my life I have hope."

What would you say to someone who is nervous about accessing services here at RHAC?

I would say that you've got everything to lose by not and everything to gain by doing it. You couldn't help but come out a better person.

What makes RHAC work for you?

RHAC is not clinical; no one uses big psychological words. People show that they care and that's how you build trust. I feel safe here. Sometimes I come in for no particular reason and just sit in here. It's not that the panic I'm feeling always goes away, but it becomes manageable.

How has your involvement with RHAC impacted how you feel about being diagnosed with hep C?

I don't have the stigma I used to associate with it. But, right now I feel that before looking at treatment, I really have to continue working on myself. I feel like I need to care about myself before I can care what happens to me.

Andy

Interviewed by: Richard MacDonagh, Case Manager at RHAC

READING NUTRITION LABELS

Eating healthy has become a hot topic in North America and there seem to be endless lists of diets that are being fed to all of us as the 'best' way to live. Proper nutrition should not, however, be about restriction and deprivation. Good health comes from getting enough of the nutrients to fuel your body to do all of the things you need and want to do. Following the recommendations of the Canadian Food Guide is often a healthier approach than any 'fad' diet, but the best way to connect with your own nutrition is to become educated about the foods you eat.

Reading food labels can feel like a daunting task, but it is really quite manageable and it gives you the tools you need to make your own decisions about your health. The first number to look at on a food label is the serving size. Serving sizes on packaging is often not related to the recommended serving sizes on the Canadian Food Guide. It can also be different from the portion you would be likely to eat in one sitting. If you are going to eat double the serving size on the label, be sure to double the other nutrition information.

The second piece of information to look at is the amount of calories in your serving. Calories are often made out to be the enemy, but that is not the case. Calories are a form of energy that fuels the body. It is best, how-

ever, for nutrients to accompany those calories. It takes energy for the immune system to fight off a virus, so an increase in caloric intake may be needed for people living with hepatitis C. If you are experiencing nausea and loss of appetite, you may find it difficult to meet your caloric needs. In that case, a high caloric beverage, such as Ensure, may be helpful.

The next part of a nutrition facts label is the daily value percentage, which value indicates the portion, out of 100, that this serving size fulfills for a 2000 calorie per day diet. Height, weight, gender, age, general health and activity level are some of the factors that determine how many calories your body needs. Because all of those factors vary from person to person, some people need more or less than 2000 calories per day. To find out how many calories your body requires, consult your doctor or a registered dietitian. You can also find an estimation of your caloric needs at the Canadian Food Guide website under the section, Estimated Energy Requirements.

The daily value percent is given for fats, sodium, carbohydrates, protein and vitamins and minerals. People living with hepatitis C should pay particular attention to certain nutrients. High fat diets may cause stress on the liver, but some fats are needed for the body to function. So, try to focus on getting fats from unsaturated

sources rather than saturated or trans fats. It is important to be aware of sodium intake as well. Generally, anything less than 5% would be considered to have a very low sodium content and anything over 20% would be considered to have a high sodium content. People living with hepatitis C should look to eat more low sodium foods because a high salt diet can contribute to ascites, an accumulation of fluids in the abdomen. Protein is the building block for a lot of the body's muscle and tissue and it is important for people living with hepatitis C to get enough protein. Still, too much protein can cause issues. It is recommended that people living with hepatitis C get their protein from vegetable and dairy sources. Iron is another nutrient to pay attention to. Iron is metabolized and stored in the liver and high iron levels can be damaging to the liver. Foods that are lower in iron should be eaten more often, but it isn't likely that iron needs to be completely removed from your diet.

There are a lot of things to look at before selecting your foods, but being informed can make a big difference in the way you choose your foods. Now you can rely on your own knowledge instead of just food packaging claims like "low fat" to make healthy food selections that are right for you.

By: Zach Templeman
Hepatitis C Educator

CARROT SALAD

Makes 4 servings

Ingredients:

1/2 lb carrots, peeled and grated.

1/4 cup minced parsley

Dressing:

3 Tbsp lemon juice

1 tsp Dijon mustard

1 tsp sugar

pinch of freshly ground black pepper

1 garlic clove, minced

1/3 cup Extra Virgin Olive Oil

Preparation:

1. Make the dressing: Combine the dressing ingredients in a medium bowl, and whisk until combined.

2. Make the salad: Add the carrots and parsley to the bowl, and toss until evenly coated with dressing. Serve and enjoy.

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

FRESH ORANGE SORBET

Makes 4 servings

from www.myrecipes.com

Ingredients

2 1/2 cups water

1 cup sugar

Orange rind strips from 2 oranges

2 2/3 cups fresh orange juice

1/3 cup fresh lemon juice

Grated orange rind (optional)

Mint sprigs (optional)



Preparation

1. Combine 2 1/2 cups water and sugar in a saucepan; bring to a boil. Add rind strips to pan. Reduce heat, and simmer for 5 minutes. Strain the sugar mixture through a sieve over a bowl, reserving liquid; discard solids. Cool sugar mixture completely.

2. Add orange juice and lemon juice to sugar mixture; stir well. Pour mixture into the freezer can of an ice-cream freezer; freeze according to manufacturer's instructions. (Or place in freezer, taking out to mix every 30 minutes to 1 hour) Spoon sorbet into a freezer-safe container; cover and freeze for 1 hour or until firm. Garnish with grated rind and mint sprigs, if desired.

CHICKPEA PASTA

Makes 4 servings

Ingredients

2 cups pasta

1 cup broccoli

2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil

2 garlic cloves, minced

1/4 teaspoon red pepper flakes

1/2 of 14.5 oz. can diced tomatoes

1/4 teaspoon freshly ground pepper

2 Tbsp Parmesan cheese (optional)

Preparation

1. Bring a large saucepan of water to a boil. Cook pasta for 6 minutes. Add broccoli and continue cooking, stirring occasionally, until the pasta and broccoli are just tender, about 3 minutes more. Drain.

2. Heat 1 tablespoon of the olive oil in a skillet over medium heat. Add the garlic and red pepper flakes and sauté for about about 30 seconds.

3. Add the chickpeas and diced tomatoes. Stir everything together and season with pepper.

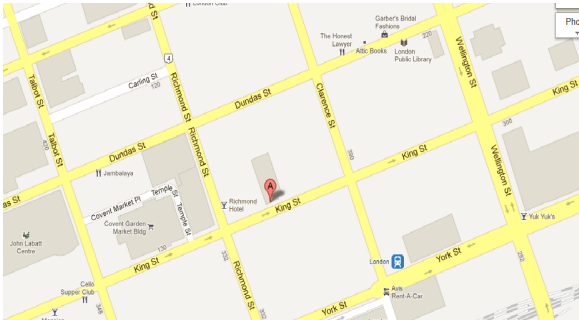
4. Add pasta and broccoli mixture and stir together. Remove from heat and drizzle with remaining olive oil. Top with Parmesan cheese (optional) and serve

REGIONAL HIV/AIDS CONNECTION

#30-186 King Street
London, Ontario
N6A 1C7

519-434-1601

www.hivaidsconnection.ca



Look for more info on our
website!
www.hivaidsconnection.ca

If you are infected with, affected by or at-risk for hepatitis C Regional HIV/AIDS Connection has got services for you! Come in and chat with us and we will do our best to help you with whatever you need.

Looking for information? Here's how we can help:

- Answer any questions you have about the virus and how to protect yourself from getting it
- Provide you with tips and information on living with the virus and help you make informed choices
- Monthly lunches with guest speakers where you can learn about and discuss specific topics related to hep C, as well as meet other people living with the virus
- Provide presentations to educate people about hepatitis C

Looking for support? Here's how we can help:

- Provide referrals to treatment providers
- Help with basic needs such as housing, applying for finances, connecting with other services in the city, etc.
- Casual counselling if you are looking for someone to talk to
- Accompany you to appointments and act as a support and advocate

HEP C PEER SOCIAL

2-4pm

Every Thursday

Location: Community Room, Regional HIV/AIDS Connection, 186 King street

The hep C Peer Social is a chance for people who are either currently living with, or have been through hep C, to connect with other people going through the same situation. This is a chance to come out, socialize and meet new people. Light snacks and refreshments will be available.

HEP C LUNCH & LEARN

12:30-1:30pm

Second Friday of every month

Location: Board Room, Regional HIV/AIDS Connection, 186 King street

The hep C Lunch & Learn is for people living with hep C or personally affected by it, to listen to information and guest speakers on topics related to hep C. Free lunch is provided. Spots fill up fast so, if possible please RSVP, to make sure you get a seat.

For more information on either of these events, or to RSVP, please contact:
Zach, Hepatitis C Educator 519-434-1601 ext 226

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