



Hepatitis C: facts for patients

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[What is my liver?]

- One of the largest organs in the body
- About the size of a football
- Located on the right side of your body
- Acts as a filter for your blood
- Helps to prevent and fight infection
- You only have 1!

Why is my liver important?

It Is Like a Factory

- It builds proteins and sugars for other parts of the body to use

It Is Like a Warehouse

- It stores vitamins, sugars, fats and nutrients and releases them when the body needs them

It Is Like a Recycling Center

- It breaks down chemicals that the body cannot use

If your liver does not work well, you may get sick

[What is hepatitis?]

- “Hepatitis” means inflammation of the liver
- An inflamed liver can be red, sore or swollen
- Hepatitis may prevent the liver from working properly
- It can be caused by:
 - Hepatitis viruses (A,B,C,D,E)
 - Alcohol
 - Genetic diseases
 - Medications (over-the-counter and prescription)

[What is Hepatitis C?]

- Identified in 1989
- Blood test only became available in 1992
- Spread via blood-to-blood contact
- No vaccine available to prevent hepatitis C

How many people have Hepatitis C?

- More than 5 million Americans are infected
- About 180 million people are infected throughout the world
- There is usually no way to tell when you might have been infected with hepatitis C
- Many people do not experience symptoms

How do people become infected with Hepatitis C?

High Risk:

- Blood products
 - Blood transfusions before 1992
 - Other blood products before 1987
 - Current transfusions no longer a major risk factor
- Snorting cocaine or other drugs
- Injection (IV) drug use
 - 60% of all new infections
- Body piercing, tattooing or acupuncture with an unsterilized needle
- Unsafe medical exposures

Other ways people become Infected with Hepatitis C

Lower Risk:

- From pregnant mother to child
- Non-sexual household contacts (rare)
 - Sharing razors and/or toothbrushes
- Sexual transmission
 - Low risk in monogamous relationship
- Unknown

[What about sex?]

- Sexual transmission is not very likely, BUT it is still possible
- If you have more than one sex partner, use condoms
- Avoid sexual activities that could cause bleeding
- If you have one long-term sex partner, you may not need to change your sex habits

[Hepatitis C is NOT spread by:]

- Sneezing
- Coughing
- Food or water
- Sharing drinking glasses or eating utensils
- Handshakes
- Holding hands
- Hugging
- Kissing on the cheek
- Playing with children
- Donating blood

How Can You Prevent the Spread of Hepatitis C?

- Cover open wounds!
- Tell people not to touch your blood
 - Clean blood spills yourself and inform others to use gloves and wash their hands
- Dispose of needles and materials properly
- Do not inject drugs

How Can You Prevent the Spread of Hepatitis C?

- Avoid sharing contaminated articles
 - Razors, toothbrushes, or nail clippers
- Inform healthcare professionals/others
- Do not donate blood, body organs, tissues or semen
- Use condoms and avoid sexual activities that could cause bleeding

Will You Know if You Have Hepatitis C?

- Many people have no symptoms of the virus
- If you do have symptoms, they may include:
 - Feeling of being tired (Fatigue)
 - Discomfort in the liver area
(on the right side of your abdomen)
 - Loss of appetite
 - Aching joints
 - Trouble sleeping
 - Depression
- The only way to know if you have Hepatitis C is to have a blood test!

[Blood Tests for Hepatitis C]

- Antibody Test: shows that you have been exposed to hepatitis C or that you have it now
- HCV RNA Test or Viral Load: shows how much virus is in your blood
- Liver Function and Enzyme Tests: shows how your liver is doing
- Genotype Test: type of hepatitis C virus

[What are liver enzymes?]

- Chemicals that your liver uses to do its work
- Healthy liver:
 - The level of enzymes in your blood is normal
- Unhealthy liver:
 - The level of enzymes can be higher than normal
- Sometimes the level of enzymes is normal even if you have liver damage

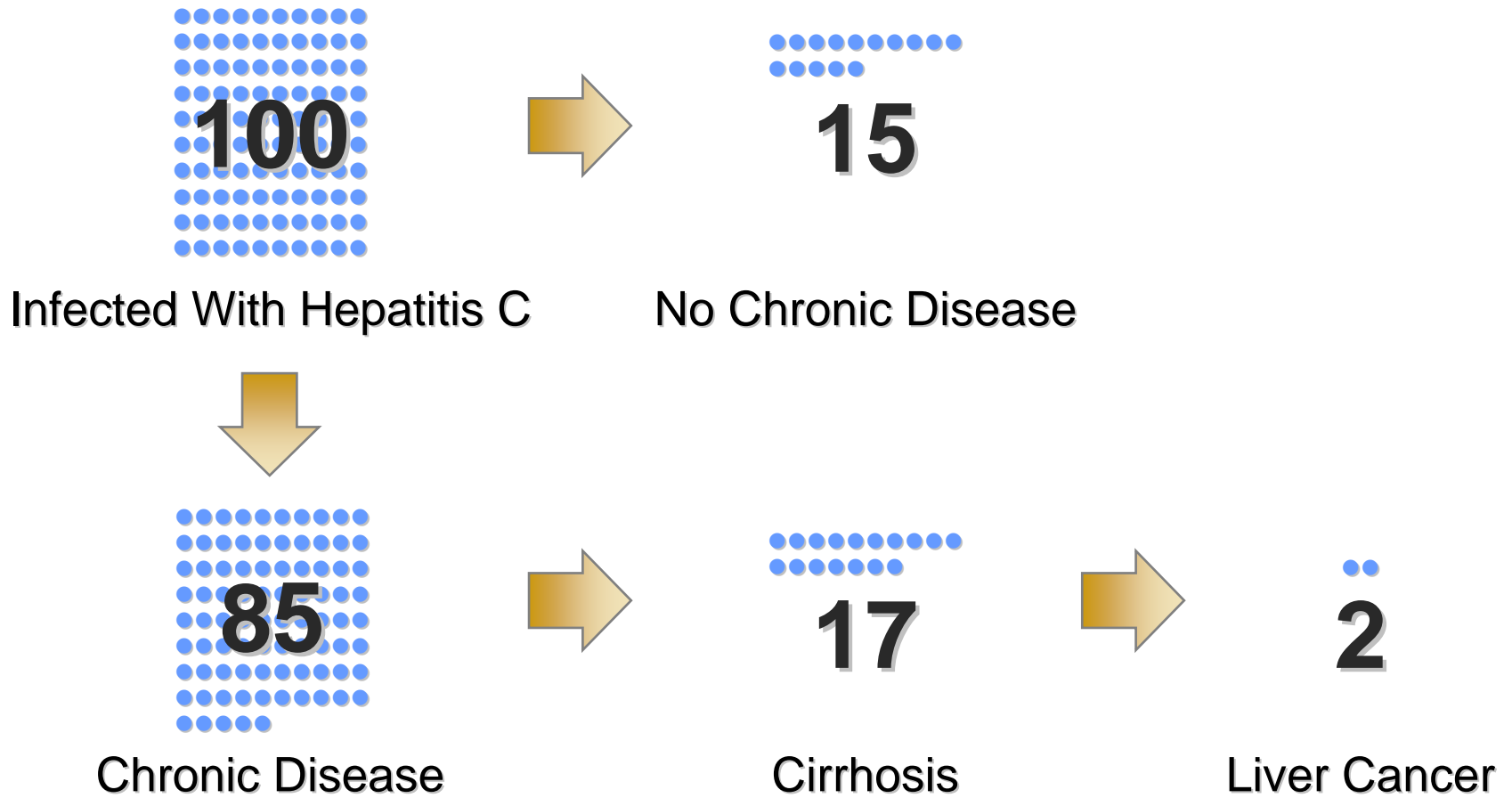
What Is My HCV Genotype?

- Genotypes are like different breeds of dogs
- 6 different genotypes which are types of Hepatitis C!
- Genotype is **NOT** related to how bad your disease is
- Genotype 1:
 - Most common in U.S.
 - Hardest to treat
- Genotypes 2 & 3:
 - Less common
 - Easier to get rid of

[What is my HCV viral load?]

- Amount of virus in your blood
- Tells if the virus is active (making more copies of itself)
 - How many copies are in your body
- The number of copies does not tell how bad your disease is
- Patients who have lower levels of virus in their blood may have a better chance of responding to therapy

What Happens to People With Hepatitis C Virus?



[Fibrosis]

- The beginning of liver scarring
- Scarring is caused by the virus attacking the liver
- Can prevent the liver from working well
- Can lead to severe scarring (cirrhosis) and liver failure

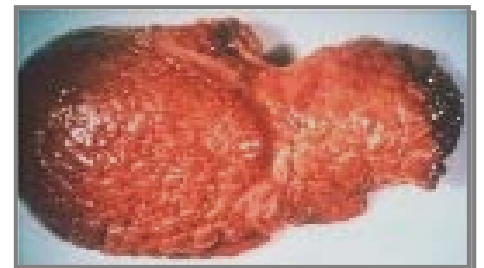
Cirrhosis

- Pronounced “sir-o-sis”
- Means “severe scarring of the liver”
- Can be caused by hepatitis, alcohol or other things that damage the liver
- Prevents the liver from functioning correctly
- Puts you at risk for liver failure and/or liver cancer
- Requires close medical follow-up

Healthy Liver



Liver with Cirrhosis



What Speeds the Progression of Hepatitis C Related Cirrhosis?

- Drinking alcohol
- People who got hepatitis C when they were older than 40
- Being male
- Smoking cigarettes
- Hepatitis B infection
- Having HIV infection
- Having a weakened immune system

Remember...

with Hepatitis C Virus, You Should:

- Avoid all alcohol
- Attain a healthy body weight
- Do not smoke cigarettes or marijuana
- Be careful with all medications
 - Including over the counter and herbal medications
- Tell all your healthcare providers what medications you are taking
 - Including medications and treatments for hepatitis C

Prevent Transmission – Play It Safe!

- Use disinfectants and bandages to cover wounds
- Do not share needles, syringes, cottons, cookers, rinse water or cocaine straws with anyone
 - They may have blood on them that you cannot see
- Carefully dispose of items that may contain your blood or body fluids
 - Like tissues, swabs, tampons
- Avoid sexual practices that may cause contact with blood. BE SAFE!
- Don't share any personal hygiene items
 - Like razors, nail files or toothbrushes

[Remember]

- HCV is curable
- Get tested
- Reach for a treatment and cure (if indicated)