

# ConsumerRx<sup>®</sup>

## Hepatitis C

### **What is hepatitis C?**

Hepatitis C is a virus that can cause inflammation and damage to the liver. Some people have this virus and never have health problems. Others may get symptoms such as abdominal swelling, have high liver function lab tests, or serious liver damage and eventually liver cancer.

### **How is Hepatitis C spread?**

Hepatitis C can be spread through contact with infected blood. This includes sharing needles, having blood transfusions and/or having unprotected sex. It is not spread through shaking hands, kissing or sharing drinking glasses.

### **Who needs to be treated?**

There is no cure for Hepatitis C at this time and treatment is not the same for everyone. Options depend on the type of virus and the health of your liver. A liver biopsy is the only way to determine whether the virus has hurt your liver. If the biopsy shows no damage, treatment may not be needed and you will be watched carefully by your doctor.

### **How is hepatitis C treated?**

Hepatitis C is treated with injections of interferon or pegylated interferon (a long acting form of the interferon medication). These medications boost the immune system which may help eliminate the virus. A medication called **ribavirin**, a generic anti-viral is often used along with the injections.

### **What are the possible side effects\* of interferon and ribavirin?**

- Weight loss
- Trouble sleeping
- Chest pain
- Nausea and vomiting
- Fever and body aches
- Extreme tiredness
- Irritability
- Depression
- Anemia (decrease in red blood cells)
- Skin rashes/itching

\*Please talk to your doctor if you experience significant side effects.

### **What else do I need to know about hepatitis C medications?**

It is very important to take hepatitis C medications as prescribed by your doctor and to avoid missing doses. Treatment may not work if medication doses are missed. It is also important to avoid alcohol and other medications that can stress the liver.

### **How do I know if the treatment worked?**

The treatment is considered successful if blood tests cannot detect hepatitis C virus for at least 6 months after treatment has ended. This means there is a good chance of avoiding serious liver problems later in life. Unfortunately, treatment does not work for all patients.

### **What if the medication therapy does not work?**

If the virus is still detected by blood tests after six months, the virus will not respond to additional medication. Taking the medication for an additional length of time won't eliminate the virus.

**Can it be treated again at a later time?**

If the Hepatitis C virus does not respond to therapy the first time, it is unlikely that additional treatment will be effective. Current scientific information does not recommend a second round of treatment unless there is a good reason to suspect the liver has severe disease.

**THE BOTTOM LINE**

Hepatitis C is a virus that can cause inflammation and long term damage to the liver. Some patients can delay therapy or do not need therapy. Treatment of Hepatitis C can have many side effects and the risks should be fully considered before starting therapy.

*Note: Since many medication options are available, our physicians and pharmacists developed this to provide you with information about the available alternatives, as well as potential advantages and lack of advantages of the various products. This medication summary was developed based upon an evaluation of information from the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA), scientific studies, and input from practicing doctors and specialists.*



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