

## Hepatitis C and HIV Co-Infection



### Promoting Liver Health

#### *How can I live a “liver healthy” life?*

There are many things you can do to promote a healthier liver such as:

- Eat a diet which focuses on fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains, legumes, nuts and seeds; avoid saturated fats.
- Exercise regularly.
- Take a high potency multiple vitamin and mineral supplement (with your health care provider's approval).
- Avoid alcohol and substance abuse.

Your health care provider can work with you, and provide more information.

*Hepatitis is inflammation of the liver, and can be a serious complication for people living with HIV, especially if undiagnosed and untreated. Vaccinations are available for hepatitis A and hepatitis B, and all people living with HIV should get them. You should also be tested for hepatitis C. HCV co-infection with HIV is common. Treatment is available for HCV infection. If untreated, hepatitis C can cause serious long-term liver damage, and is a major cause of illness and death in people living with HIV/AIDS.*

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## Hepatitis C and HIV Co-Infection:

*What You  
Need to Know*

**ANAC**  
ASSOCIATION OF  
NURSES IN AIDS CARE



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## Liver Function and Hepatitis

### *What does my liver do?*

Your liver stores and filters blood, removing wastes. It also makes bile, which is released into your stomach and helps digest fat. It processes nutrients from foods, releasing energy to your bloodstream, and storing vitamins and minerals. Also, your liver plays an important role in processing medicines, including HIV drugs.

### *What can damage my liver?*

Liver damage is characterized as “**fibrosis**” (hardening or scarring) or “**cirrhosis**” (severe scarring that makes the liver no longer work properly). Liver damage may be caused by:

- Excessive alcohol intake.
- Using certain recreational drugs.
- Medicines, such as some HIV drugs.
- Viruses (notably hepatitis viruses).

### *What is hepatitis?*

“**Hepatitis**” means inflammation of the liver. There are five types of viral hepatitis – A, B, C, D & E. - each with different characteristics.

### *Are there vaccines for hepatitis?*

HAV and HBV vaccines are available, and HIV-positive individuals are encouraged to get vaccinated. There is **no** vaccine against HCV.

## Hepatitis C 101

### *What is hepatitis C?*

“**Hepatitis C**” is a viral infection affecting the liver and the lymphatic system. HCV is transmitted primarily through direct blood-to-blood contact, including sharing equipment for injection drug use. It may also be sexually transmitted.

### *What are the symptoms?*

Approximately 20-30% of people have symptoms when first infected with HCV.

Symptoms include:

- Yellowing of the skin or eyes (jaundice).
- Diarrhea.
- Unexplained weight loss.
- Intolerance to alcohol, fatty foods
- Depression.

### *How is HCV infection diagnosed?*

A blood test can determine HCV exposure. U.S. Public Health Service/Infectious Diseases Society of America (IDSA) guidelines recommend that people living with HIV/AIDS be tested for hepatitis C at least once a year.

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## Hepatitis C 101

### *Can I have hepatitis C and HIV?*

Individuals can be infected with both HIV and HCV (known as “**co-infection**”). Many studies have confirmed the link between HIV and HCV co-infection and faster progression of liver disease.

### *Is hepatitis C treatable?*

Treatment is available for hepatitis C, but it is based on strain (or “**genotype**”). Age, gender, duration of infection, degree of liver damage, and whether cirrhosis has developed can impact treatment decisions. Unlike HIV treatment, treatment for hepatitis C consists of a 24- or 48-week course.

### *Can you take HIV drugs if you are co-infected with HCV?*

HIV treatment can be used safely and effectively in individuals who are co-infected with HIV and HCV. Your health care provider will consider the following factors in designing your HIV treatment:

- Avoiding drugs with liver-related side effects.
- Avoiding drugs that can contribute to metabolic disorders, including diabetes.