

a series of fact sheets written
by experts in the field of liver
disease

Alcohol and HCV

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One of the first recommendations given to patients with hepatitis C virus (HCV) infection is to abstain from alcohol use. This recommendation is especially important for HCV patients undergoing antiviral therapy. Patients who drink during HCV treatment are less likely to clear virus. Both the American Association for the Study of Liver Diseases (AASLD) and the National Institutes of Health (NIH) Consensus statement strongly encourage that HCV patients avoid all alcohol use.

Alcohol abstinence is recommended for HCV patients in much the same way as it is suggested that one wear a parachute when jumping from an airplane. It is not a debatable recommendation. Yet despite this, some patients want hard facts. Can they drink a “little” or “on special occasions?” The answer to this is not known, but total abstinence is advised. In short, why take an unnecessary risk? As

one patient put it, “I view occasional moderate drinking in much the same way as Russian roulette; it’s like putting a gun to my liver, pulling the trigger, and hoping I don’t shoot myself.” One thing we know for certain, alcohol does not improve liver health.

Unfortunately some individuals find it difficult to give up drinking. The National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information (NCADI) reports that about 14 million Americans meet the criteria for a diagnosis of alcoholism or abuse. Roughly 1 in 13 adults has an alcohol problem. Alcohol abuse doesn’t just affect livers. It can threaten the immune system, the brain, financial security, relationships, and families. In short, it can influence every aspect of life.

How do you know if you have a drinking problem? There are questionnaires that can help you identify if you have an alcohol problem (see Resources). National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) suggests using the **CAGE** questionnaire: “Answering the following four questions can help you find out if you or a loved one has a drinking problem:

- Have you ever felt you should **C**ut down on your drinking?
- Have people **A**nnoyed you by criticizing your drinking?
- Have you ever felt bad or **G**uilty about your drinking?
- Have you ever taken a morning **E**ye-opener (drink first thing in the morning)?

One “yes” answer suggests a possible alcohol problem. More than one “yes” answer means it is highly likely that a problem exists. If you think that you or someone you know might have an alcohol problem, it is important to see a doctor or other health care provider right away. They can help you determine if a drinking problem exists and plan the best course of action.”

If you are unable to quit drinking, you may need help. Alcoholism is a disease, not a character flaw. There are many resources to assist those with alcohol problems, including professional, non-professional, self-help, spiritual, and secular-based approaches. If one method does not work, try another until you find one that works for you.

Resources

Alcoholic Anonymous (AA)

www.alcoholics-anonymous.org

To find an AA group near you, look for "Alcoholics Anonymous" in any telephone directory or contact AA World Service, PO Box 459, New York, NY 10163

(212) 870-3400

American Council on Alcoholism

www.aca-usa.org

Nationwide HelpLine 800.527.5344

National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA)

www.niaaa.nih.gov

5635 Fishers Lane, MSC 9304

Bethesda, Maryland 20892-9304

National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information (NCADI)

www.health.org

(800) 729-6686

National Drug Treatment and Referral Routing Service: (800) 662-HELP (4357)

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)

www.samhsa.gov

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- Hepatitis Journal Review
- Weekly News Review
- Disability & Benefits Column
- Hepatitis B information
- HIV/HCV Coinfection information
- Support Group Listings for USA, Canada and Elsewhere
- Links to Clinical Trials
- Links to other Helpful Organisations
- Event Listings
- Fact Sheet series: (English, French and Spanish)
 - *Easy C Facts
 - *Basics
 - *HCSP Fact Sheets

For more information about hepatitis C, hepatitis B and HCV coinfections, please visit www.hcvadvocate.org.

• *hcspFACTsheet* •

A publication of the Hepatitis C Support Project

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The information in this fact sheet is designed to help you understand and manage HCV and is not intended as medical advice. All persons with HCV should consult a medical practitioner for diagnosis and treatment of HCV.

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