

Symptoms of the Hepatitis C Virus

The presence, absence, or severity of symptoms, are not accurate indicators of how serious your liver disease may be. A possible reason for the absence of symptoms, is the liver's large reserve of cells that allow it to function normally, even when much of it has been destroyed.

The most common symptoms could include:

- Chronic fatigue (unending tiredness).
- Nausea and vomiting.
- Upset stomach.
- Poor sleep.
- Muscle and joint aches.
- Low grade fever and flu like symptoms.
- Loss of appetite and weight loss.
- Itchy skin, usually with no rash.
- Severe long-lasting abdominal pain and discomfort.
- Depression.
- Brain fog, which is characterized by problems with short term memory, concentration and staying focused on tasks.
- Lassitude, which is a lack of energy to the point where you feel you cannot apply yourself. This feeling of extreme tiredness goes past being exhausted; it continues even if you have a full night's sleep.

Chronic or advanced symptoms could include:

- Jaundice, which is yellow eyes and skin.
- Dark urine and pale or clay colored bowel movements.
- High blood pressure.
- Easy bruising.
- Decreased thinking ability; mental confusion, difficulty reasoning & memory loss.
- Personality changes and emotional problems.
- Stomach swelling.
- Increased sensitivity to drugs.
- Edema, which is swelling of the feet.

Additional Information

This **Six Pamphlet Series**, along with the **Resource Directory**, is designed to provide you with a list of people in your community who can help give you a better understanding of Hepatitis C, such as: how to prevent its spread, treatment choices available and ways to take control of your life through healthy lifestyle choices.

- **See** the Manitoba Hepatitis C Resource Directory for a glossary of terms and definitions and HCV resource contacts within the community.
- **Read** the entire Six Pamphlet Series on Hepatitis C.
- **Contact** the Manitoba Hepatitis C Support Community by telephone at: 779-6464, email: info@mbhepc.org or through our website: www.mbhepc.org

Hepatitis C And Your Liver

Pamphlet # **2**
in a 6 Pamphlet Series
On Hepatitis C

- **What Your Liver Does**
- **The Hepatitis C Virus In Your Liver**
- **Symptoms of the Hepatitis C Virus**



What Your Liver Does

Your liver performs many important functions and is one of your body's largest and most important organs. You can find it on the right side of your stomach (abdomen), just under the rib cage. It is about the size of a football, weighing 3 to 4 pounds. Your liver works 24 hours a day and performs more than 500 jobs for your body that are necessary for you to live. Nearly all the blood returning from your intestinal tract to your heart passes through your liver and at any given moment your liver will hold a pint of blood. Your liver is needed for your body to work and be healthy – you cannot live without it.

Your liver is very tough. It can still work after losing 80% to 90% of its cells to disease. It can completely rebuild itself in a few weeks even if much of it has been removed during surgery. But it can be destroyed. Toxins such as alcohol, drugs and viruses such as Hepatitis A and B can cause permanent damage to your liver.

Everything you eat, drink, breath and soak in through your skin eventually reaches your liver. Liver cells control a process called metabolism, in which your liver breaks down nutrients from the food you eat into usable by-products and changes most medicines you may take into forms your body can use. These by-products are delivered to the rest of your body by your bloodstream. Your liver also metabolizes toxins such as alcohol and drugs, into by-products that can be safely eliminated from the body.

Although separating nutrients from waste is one of your liver's most important functions, it's not the only one. Your liver is a storage depot for sugar, which is released into your body when you need energy. It removes old red blood cells and it's also a chemical factory, making a lot of stuff that performs life-giving jobs for the body. Some things made by the liver include:

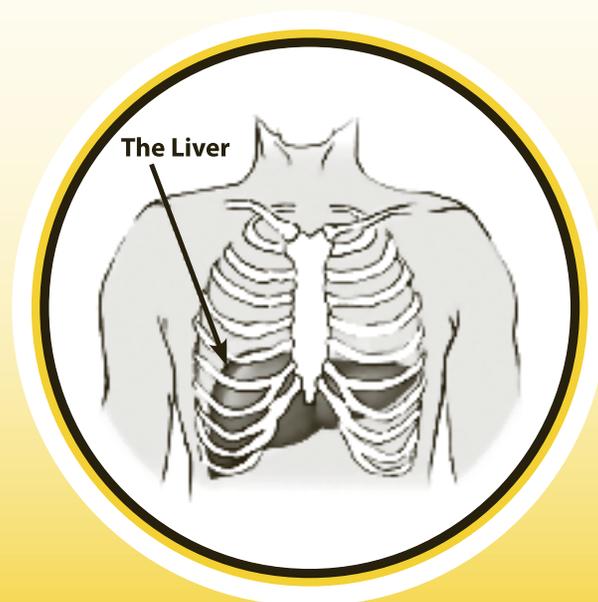
Immune factors, which protect against infection and bacteria.

Cholesterol, a product needed by every cell in the body.

Bile, a fluid that carries away waste and digests fat in the small intestine.

Clotting factors, which help stop bleeding.

Glucose, simple sugars which are produced, stored and supplied to the rest of your body.



The Hepatitis C Virus in Your Liver

When you contract the hepatitis C virus, it lives in your liver and takes over your healthy liver cells, causing those cells to become inflamed or damaged. Over time, this may affect the way your liver works. How Hepatitis C affects you and your liver, and if, or when you will experience any decreased liver function, is different for everyone. There is no way to tell how you will react to the hepatitis C virus; however, there are some things that are known:

- You can live with hepatitis C for many years without experiencing any major symptoms.
- Symptoms may come and go over time. The presence or absence of symptoms does not relate to the amount of liver damage that you may have.
- Chronic, long term swelling of the liver can cause liver cell damage and result in fibrosis, or even cirrhosis.
- Fibrosis and cirrhosis can happen in as little as 5 years, or can take as long as 30+ years to develop.
- About 15% to 20% of patients with chronic hepatitis will develop cirrhosis in 15 to 20 years.
- The use of recreational drugs and particularly **alcohol** will accelerate and affect how quickly the swelling develops into fibrosis or cirrhosis.
- There is an increased risk of liver cancer in people with cirrhosis.