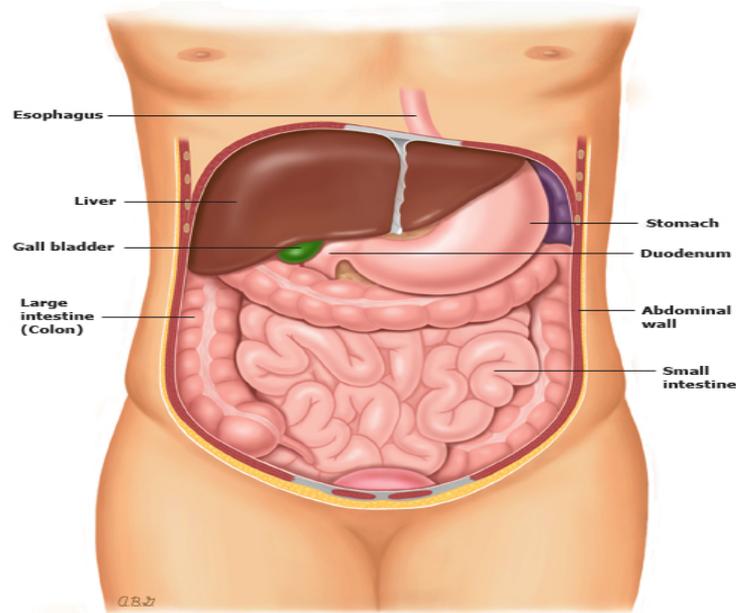


OKLAHOMA DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS HEPATITIS C AND TREATMENT EDUCATION

What is hepatitis C? — Hepatitis C is a disease that harms the liver. The liver is a big organ in the upper right side of the belly ([figure 1](#)). A virus causes this disease. The virus is called the hepatitis C virus. It spreads from person to person through contact with blood. This can happen in a few ways, like sharing drug needles or having sex.

Figure 1



What are the symptoms of hepatitis C? — Most people with hepatitis C have no symptoms. When symptoms do occur, they can include:

- Feeling tired or weak
- Lack of hunger
- Nausea
- Muscle or joint aches
- Weight loss

In most cases, hepatitis C lasts for many years. That can lead to liver scarring, called “cirrhosis.” Many people with cirrhosis have no symptoms. When symptoms do occur, they can include:

- Swelling in the belly and legs, and fluid build-up in the lungs
- Bruising or bleeding easily
- Trouble taking in a full breath
- Feeling full in the belly
- Yellowing of the skin or whites of the eyes, called jaundice
- Confusion that can come on suddenly
- Coma

How did I get the disease? — You can catch the hepatitis C virus if you have contact with the blood of someone who is infected. This can happen if you:

- Share drug needles or cocaine straws
- Use infected needles for tattooing, acupuncture, or piercings
- Share toothbrushes, razors, or other things that could have blood on them
- Got a blood transfusion before 1990 (when the way blood was handled changed)
- Have sex with someone who is infected

A pregnant woman who is infected can also give hepatitis C to her baby.

Some people who have hepatitis C do not remember how they were infected. In the United States, many people with hepatitis C were born between 1945 and 1965. If you were born during these years, your doctor might want to test you for hepatitis C even if you did not do any of the things that put you at risk of infection.

OKLAHOMA DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS
HEPATITIS C AND TREATMENT EDUCATION

Is there a test for hepatitis C? — Yes. Your doctor might order a few tests; Blood tests can show:

- If you have hepatitis C
- What type of the virus you have (there are at least 6 types)
- Which treatment will work best for you

If you have hepatitis C, your doctor will also want to know if you have any liver scarring. Ways to check for scarring include:

- Blood tests
- Liver scan – This is a type of imaging test that can show how much scarring you have. Not all doctors have access to the machine that does the scan.
- Biopsy – For this test, a doctor puts a needle into your liver and takes out a small sample of tissue. The sample will show how bad the damage is.

How is hepatitis C treated? — Treatment depends on what type of hepatitis C you have. There are different medicines to treat hepatitis C. Some of them only work on certain forms of the hepatitis C virus. You will have to take a combination of 2 or more medicines based on which virus you have. The medicines might come in pill form or in shots that you give yourself. Treatment usually lasts 3 months to a year.

Some of the medicines used to treat hepatitis C are not appropriate for pregnant women, or for men or women who are not using reliable birth control. Before you start treatment, ask your doctor whether you need to be on reliable birth control for the treatment he or she suggests. Your doctor can help you decide if these medicines are right for you.

Is there anything I can do to protect my liver? — Yes, you can:

- Avoid alcohol.
- Maintain a healthy weight.
- Get vaccinated for hepatitis A and B.
- Get vaccinated for pneumonia, the flu, and other diseases.
- Ask your doctor or nurse before taking any over-the-counter pain medicines (these medicines can sometimes damage the liver).
- Avoid marijuana.

What if I want to get pregnant? — If you want to get pregnant, talk to your doctor or nurse first. About 1 in 20 women who have hepatitis C pass the virus on to the baby during pregnancy. That number goes up in women who are also infected with HIV.

What will my life be like? — Many people with hepatitis C are able to live normal lives. Treatment can cure the disease in many cases.

If you have hepatitis C, it is still safe to:

- Hug, kiss, and touch other people (but you can spread the infection through sex)
- Share forks, spoons, cups, and food
- Sneeze or cough
- Breastfeed

Should I be treated for hepatitis C? — You and your doctor will need to decide together whether you should be treated. Treatment is not right for everyone. To decide on treatment, you and your doctor will need to think about:

- What type of hepatitis C you have (there are several types; type 1 is the most common in the United States)
- How old you are and how long you have had hepatitis C
- If you have been treated for hepatitis C before
- How much liver damage you have
- What other health problems you have
- Whether you use a reliable form of birth control

OKLAHOMA DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS HEPATITIS C AND TREATMENT EDUCATION

How is hepatitis C treated? — It depends on what type of hepatitis C you have ([table 1](#)). There are different medicines to treat hepatitis C. Some of them only work on certain forms of the hepatitis C virus. You will have to take a combination of 2 or more medicines based on which virus you have. Most of the medicines come in pill form. Treatment usually lasts 3 to 6 months.

If you are being treated for hepatitis C, it is very important that you:

- Take **ALL** your medicines exactly how your doctor or nurse tells you to
- Never skip doses
- Never stop any of your medicines unless your doctor or nurse tells you to

What happens if I do not take hepatitis medicines as directed? — If you take these medicines the wrong way, they probably will not work as well as they should. You can also end up doing yourself more harm than good. With some of the medicines, if people skip doses or do not take all their medicines, the hepatitis C virus can quickly become “resistant.” That means that the virus learns to outsmart the medicines, and so the medicines will not work. These medicines will remain on Pill Line to ensure proper compliance and to avoid resistance.

Do the medicines for hepatitis C cause side effects? — Yes, they can cause side effects, but most of them are not serious. If you are being treated for hepatitis C, you should call your doctor any time you develop a side effect that bothers you. Some of the medicines used to treat hepatitis can make you tired or sick to your stomach, or give you headaches. Rarely, some can cause a problem called anemia, which is when you do not have enough red blood cells to carry oxygen around your body. Some can cause a skin rash.

If you get any side effects that bother you, especially a rash, tell your doctor or nurse. Your doctor or nurse will want to see your skin so he or she can decide how bad the rash is. He or she will also want to know right away if you start feeling light-headed or extremely weak or breathless. These can be signs of severe anemia.

In very rare cases, people need to stop taking their medicines because of side effects. But **DO NOT STOP TAKING YOUR MEDICINES** because of side effects until you speak with your doctor or nurse. Only he or she can tell if you need to stop the medicines. Besides, your doctor or nurse might have a way to deal with the side effects so that you can keep taking the medicines. For example, if you are itchy, your doctor or nurse might give you a medicine to relieve itch. If you have anemia, your doctor might lower the dose you take of the medicine causing the problem. The point is, there are ways to deal with side effects so that you are comfortable enough to keep taking your medicines.

Even if your doctor can't make your side effects go away completely, remember that you only need to take these medicines for a while. If you put up with some side effects, there is a good chance you will be cured.

What if I already take other medicines? — Most hepatitis C medicines can cause serious problems when they are taken with certain other medicines. This is called a “drug interaction.” To prevent problems due to drug interactions, review a list of all of your medicines, including herbal and non-prescription medicines, with your doctor whenever you start a new medicine.

Will I be cured? — If you take your medicines exactly the way you are supposed to, the chances of being cured are good. People who have not been treated for hepatitis C before are cured over 90 percent of the time. People who have failed treatment before or who have cirrhosis have a slightly lower chance of cure. But cure rates are improved with newer treatments.

At least 3 to 6 months after you finish treatment, your doctor or nurse will give you a blood test to see if you are cured. If you had cirrhosis prior to treatment, they may give you another blood test to ensure you are cured 1 year after completing treatment.

**OKLAHOMA DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS
HEPATITIS C AND TREATMENT EDUCATION**

Medicines commonly used to treat hepatitis C

Medicine	US Brand name(s)	Can be used to treat which types of hepatitis C?	Special instructions	Speak to your doctor right away if you have side effects like these or others that worry you. But DO NOT STOP taking the medicine without first speaking to your doctor.
Ribavirin	Copegus, Rebetol, others	All types	This medicine comes in a pill you take 2 times a day with food. Anyone taking this medicine—man or woman—must use 2 reliable forms of birth control while taking it. Speak to your doctor to get the details.	Fatigue and weakness (may mean you have anemia) Skin rash
Ledipasvir-sofosbuvir	Harvoni	Types 1 and 4	A combination pill you take once a day.	Major side effects have not been seen.
Ombitasvir-paritaprevir-ritonavir plus dasabuvir	Viekira Pak	Type 1	2 pills you take once a day every morning, plus one pill you take twice a day. Always talk to your doctor before taking any other medicine with Viekira Pak. For example, it is not safe for women to use most oral birth control pills while on this medicine. Talk to your doctor to find out about other types of birth control.	Major side effects have not been seen.
Sofosbuvir	Sovaldi	Types 1, 2, 3 and 4	A pill you take once a day.	Major side effects have not been seen.
Simeprevir	Olysio	Type 1	A pill you take once a day with food. Use protection from sun.	Skin rash

If you are being treated for hepatitis C, you will likely get 1 or 2 of the medicines listed above. Your doctor will decide what combination of medicines to give you based on the type of hepatitis you have and on your individual situation.

This is NOT a complete list of side effects or warnings. No person with hepatitis C should drink alcohol, especially during treatment.