

NEW HEPATITIS C TREATMENTS

A GUIDE TO GETTING TREATED BY YOUR GP



This guide aims to help you to talk to your GP about the tests and referrals you may need to start the new hepatitis C treatments.

The Hepatitis C virus (HCV) is a virus that has had a huge impact on people who inject drugs. Left untreated HCV can lead to serious problems including liver cirrhosis and cancer. There is now some exciting news that you need to know about:

- New medications to treat people living with hepatitis C have been made available on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS). They are pills taken every day for between 8 and 12 weeks for most people. For most genotypes, these new medications have cure rates of 90-95%.
- In most cases you can access treatment through your doctor (General Practitioner or GP) and don't need to see a specialist.
- **You do not have to be drug-free to go on treatment.**
- **There is no longer any need to have a liver biopsy and these new drugs do not have the same side-effects as the old interferon-based treatments.**
- **Taking the medication every day is important as it effects how well the treatment will work.**

STEP BY STEP - A GUIDE TO GETTING TREATMENT

1

See your doctor and ask whether they are willing to prescribe hepatitis C treatment. If they aren't, ask them to refer you to a GP who will, or refer you to the Canberra Hospital Liver Clinic.

2

If your GP is unsure of how to give you treatment, tell them that there is a fact sheet available for GPs called "Managing Chronic Hepatitis C", available on Hepatitis ACT and CAHMA's website as well as a link to the treatment form they will need to complete to begin your treatment.

<http://hepatitisact.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/GP-Factsheet-Updated-April-2017.pdf>

3

To complete your assessment for treatment your GP will need to arrange some tests. Depending on what you have already done, this may include:

- An anti-body blood test (which tells you if you have been exposed to HCV)
- A PCR blood test (which tells you if your body has cleared HCV by itself (25% of people clear HCV without treatment) and if not what genotype you have and your viral load).

NOTE: get your GP to do both blood tests at once by writing "if Hep C Ab positive, Hep C PCR for viral load and genotype" on the blood test referral.

- A fibroscan or shearwave elastography (which tells you how healthy your liver is). GPs can arrange:

Fibroscan through the Canberra Hospital Liver Clinic (02) 6244 2195 or

Shearwave through:

- Garran Medical Imaging (02) 6225 7070
- Canberra Imaging Group 1300 788 508
- Universal Medical Imaging (02) 6126 5000

4

Once your doctor has this information they can secure approval to treat you by filling in the HCV referral form. A link can be found at the following address:

https://actsnsw.healthpathways.org.au/referral/ACT_HCV_Treatment_Referral.pdf

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Unless your liver is severely damaged, you have an unusual genotype or you have HIV or hepatitis B your doctor simply fills in the form, faxes it to the Liver Clinic for approval, gets an authorisation code from the Health Department, and then you can start treatment. Other information your GP will need:

- Your current medications
- Your allergies
- A current negative pregnancy test for women
- Your current drug use especially alcohol consumption

Note: your GP will ask about alcohol and other drug consumption to determine if they think you are stable enough to complete treatment.

6

Once your form has been returned to your doctor your GP can get an authorisation number from the Health Department and prescribe the right medication for you.

7

Treatment for most people is 8 or 12 weeks depending on your genotype.

8

Your GP will follow up with you through-out your treatment.

DURING TREATMENT

While undertaking treatment it is important to:

- Consult with your doctor if you have any serious side effects. You may experience side effects such as nausea, fatigue and sleeplessness which your GP may not be able to help with. If this is happening ring CAHMA or Hepatitis ACT for support.
- Always take your medication at the same time every day. This will give you the best chance to clear the virus.
- Contact your dispensing pharmacy about a week before your medication runs out, so they can arrange to have your next script filled. It can take them a day or two for the medicine to be delivered to them. It is important to ensure there are no missed doses during treatment.
- Eat healthy, exercise regularly and sleep well if possible.
- Make sure you have support. Find some friends or family who you can tell and let them help you.
- There are community organisations who can help such as CAHMA and Hepatitis ACT and telephone support available from the National Hepatitis Helpline (1800 437 222).

COMMUNITY REFERRAL OPTIONS



CAHMA is the Canberra Alliance for Harm Minimisation and Advocacy – Canberra’s peer-based drug user organisation, run by and for people who use, or have used, illicit drugs. Services include peer support, education, representation and advocacy.

(02) 6253 3643
Northpoint Plaza, 16/8 Chandler St, Belconnen
info@cahma.org.au
www.cahma.org.au



Hepatitis ACT is Canberra’s community hepatitis organisation, funded by ACT Health to deliver a comprehensive range of hepatitis-related programs and no-cost supports.

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