

Hep C factsheets

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Avoid restrictive or cleansing diets as there is little clinical or biological basis to support them. The bottom line is that if you don't have serious liver damage (e.g. cirrhosis) there are no particular foods that you should seek or avoid. If you do have serious liver damage, speak to your specialist or doctor for dietary advice.

Alcohol

Research shows that your risk of developing liver damage is higher if you are a heavy drinker. Controlling your alcohol intake should be the first step towards reducing the risk of serious liver damage.

It is recommended that you reduce your alcohol use to, or below, the National Recommendations for the general public: men and women should drink no more than two standard drinks per day (a standard drink is one schooner of light beer, one middy of full strength beer, one standard glass of wine or one nip of spirits).

If you have difficulty reducing your alcohol intake to the National Recommendations, seek advice from your doctor or the Alcohol & Drug Information Service (see page 37). The following tips may also be helpful:

- Try low alcohol drinks.
- Follow each alcoholic drink with several non-alcoholic drinks.
- Avoid places where there is pressure to drink.
- Avoid drinking in rounds (having turns at buying everyone's drinks).
- Finish each drink and then wait a while before starting a new one.

Staying healthy

Staying as healthy as possible will help you cope better with hep C. Eating a wide variety of food in the right balance will help you improve your health. The following advice about diet and food has been developed by hep C dietitians. It aims to dispel myths and promote better eating habits.

Type 2 diabetes (non-insulin dependent) is diet related and more common in people with hep C. This makes it especially important that you avoid overuse of sugars, avoid becoming overweight and stay as fit as possible. Speak to your doctor or specialist about blood tests to see if you are at risk.

Nausea

Hep C can make people feel sick in the stomach (nausea), which can affect appetite. Although there is usually no vomiting it can be very uncomfortable.

- Try avoiding large or high-fat meals for a period of time to see if this has any impact.
- If cooking smells make you feel ill, avoid them by microwaving previously prepared and frozen meals.
- Acidophilus yoghurt, vitamin B6 and camomile tea may help to reduce nausea. Ginger may also help so try fresh ginger with meals, ginger tablets, ginger beer or ginger tea.
- Eat bitter foods (e.g. olives, rocket lettuce) before main meals to improve digestion.
- Avoid drinking fluids during meals and do not lie down within 30 minutes of eating.

Fats

Unfortunately, eating too much fat is common among Australians. It puts us at greater risk of getting heart disease and diabetes and of becoming overweight. Because of this, people are generally advised to eat less fat.

You shouldn't cut out all fats and oils because some are needed by your body to make hormones, and for cells to function properly.

Try eating reduced-fat dairy products and other foods, and fat-trimmed, lean meats. Avoid processed foods that are high in saturated fat or trans-fat.

Salt

High salt intake can increase your blood pressure and your risk of heart disease and stroke. Most of our salt intake (about 75%) comes from processed foods and it is worth trying low-salt or salt-reduced varieties of these foods. Additionally, use less salt in your cooking and on the food you eat.

Coffee and caffeine

Caffeine, the active ingredient in coffee, can increase your alertness. There is growing evidence that moderate caffeine intake has a protective effect on the liver. Phone the *Hep C Helpline* for more information.

Sugars

Sugars are sources of energy but they are not essential nutrients. It is better to get your energy from nutrient-rich foods like whole grains, meats, fruits, cereals and vegetables. Many processed foods contain added sugar but whether this poses a health problem depends on your overall sugar intake.

You should avoid eating too much sugar or becoming overweight, both of which increase your risk of developing type 2 diabetes.

Red meat

There is no scientific evidence suggesting people with hep C have problems eating red meat. In small servings with the fat removed, red meat is a very useful food to include in a balanced diet. It is a valuable source of iron and B group vitamins.

Dairy foods

Although dairy foods can contain high levels of saturated fats, they are excellent sources of other nutrients essential for health. It is hard to get enough calcium if you exclude milk products from your diet. Choose lower-fat dairy products if you are concerned about your level of fat intake.

Food colours and preservatives

There is no scientific evidence to suggest people with hep C have particular problems with artificial colours or preservatives in foods. Avoiding all artificial colours and flavours would severely limit your shopping choices and add unnecessary stress to your life.

Anyone with a known sensitivity to particular colours, preservatives or foods should be careful, whether they have hep C or not.

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Vitamin and mineral supplements

Illness can increase your body's need for vitamins and minerals but if you are eating well you should be getting enough from your food intake. Vitamin and mineral supplements may be useful if your appetite is poor.

Care should be taken not to exceed the recommended dose as this may be harmful. It is best to avoid vitamin A as large doses or long term use is associated with abnormal liver function tests and possible increased fibrosis.

Further health information

If you eat well, exercise, do not smoke and are careful about your alcohol intake, you will be doing all you need to keep yourself healthy.

For further information about good health, speak to your doctor. If you have a level of liver damage or symptoms that require more specialised dietary and lifestyle advice, your doctor will probably refer you to a dietitian or specialist at your local hospital.

Also see

The Guide to Healthy Eating for People with Hepatitis C (booklet)

Hepatitis C and Food (brochure)

Dietitians Association of Australia
<http://www.daa.asn.au/>

- This factsheet was developed by the Hepatitis C Council of NSW in collaboration with a group of hep C related dietitians. It was reviewed by the Hepatitis C Council of NSW Medical and Research Advisory Panel.

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Hep C Helpline and *HepConnect* (peer support): 02 9332 1599 / 1800 803 990

Web info: www.hepatitisc.org.au Web peer support: www.hepcaustralasia.org

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