



HEPATITIS FOUNDATION
INTERNATIONAL

TIPS ON COPING WITH CHRONIC HEPATITIS

Chronic hepatitis can cause added stress to a busy, overwhelmed individual. Physical symptoms of hepatitis can increase the emotional toll of coping, so finding techniques to minimize physical distress is a key. Ways exist to ease the frustrations and complications caused by hepatitis. Good lines of communication are essential in the doctor/patient relationship. Be sure to tell your doctor about the symptoms you are experiencing. They may indicate changes in the way your liver is functioning. Your physician may have suggestions or medications that can help you cope. In between doctor's visits, write down the questions you have. It is too easy to forget specifics until the problem reappears.

- With chronic liver disease your physician may suggest vaccination against pneumonia, hepatitis A, and possibly hepatitis B for those not already infected or immune.
- Fatigue is a common problem. Finding a happy balance between relaxation and activities is helpful. Frequently, short naps between activities or outings prevent overwhelming fatigue at the end of the day. Don't plan too many activities for one day, instead space them out over a week. Separate the activities requiring a lot of energy with less strenuous ones. Allow yourself time to regroup while still keeping busy. If your work day is exhausting, try arranging flexible hours or work from home option. Telecommuting, the computer-modem connection, creates new opportunities everyday.
- Nausea sometimes turns mealtime into a dreaded activity. Medication may help fight that feeling.
- A well balanced diet is important to maintaining a healthy body. Try eating frequent, small snacks or meals instead of traditional, larger meals. Plan meals at times when the nausea is the least troublesome.
- Be careful not to take vitamins or nutritional supplements without discussing it with your doctor first. Some vitamins, Vitamin A in particular, can cause liver damage when taken in large doses.
- While doctors' opinions differ about drinking alcohol, hepatitis patients must remember alcohol is a toxin and can cause problems for your already compromised liver.
- In addition to the physical symptoms, hepatitis can cause emotional stress. It is important to have people you can count on for support and encouragement. Talk to friends and loved ones about difficulties you experience and what you need from them. People are not mind readers, and open discussions can help minimize problems and misunderstandings. Support from loved ones and a friend makes coping easier. Try not to set unreasonable standards for yourself or anyone else.
- Another source of support is provided by HFI's Patient Advocacy/Support Telecommunications System (PATS). With your written permission, HFI will share your name and phone number with other hepatitis patients in your area. Sometimes it helps to talk to someone experiencing similar problems caused by hepatitis. Drop us a note or call to ask for a PATS registration form.