



Managing Side Effects in Hepatitis C Virus Care

Hepatitis C Virus (HCV) treatment has greatly improved with new medications and it's now possible to cure the virus. To successfully treat HCV, you will need to take your medications exactly as instructed, without missing doses. This can be difficult if you experience any side effects from your medication. While side effects are much less common with the newer treatments compared to previous therapies, they can still occur. If you do experience any side effects, it's important to manage them early so that they don't interfere with your treatment. Amber Specialty Pharmacy is here to help you manage all aspects of your condition, including side effects.

Every patient feels different when going through treatment. The following are some of the more common side effects you may experience while going through HCV treatment and how to best manage them.



Symptoms to Report to Your Doctor Immediately

- Extreme fatigue
- Weakness
- Unexplained weight loss
- Yellow skin or eyes
- Persistent fever
- Severe nausea, vomiting or diarrhea
- Abdominal pain – especially in the upper right part of the belly
- Swelling of the abdomen
- Severely itchy skin
- Sudden confusion
- Bruising or bleeding easily

Headaches

Headache is one of the most common side effects of HCV treatment. Ask your doctor if you are able to take pain relievers and which ones are best for you. Always check with your doctor or pharmacist before starting a new medication to ensure its safe with your HCV medication.

- ▶ Drink a lot of water, unless your doctor has limited how much you can have.
- ▶ If you get a headache, keep the lights dim and avoid loud noises and strong smells. Rest and try to relax until the headache goes away.
- ▶ Seek medical attention if these tips don't relieve your headache, if the headache is severe or if you have additional symptoms (vision changes, numbness, confusion or trouble speaking).

Nausea

When going through HCV treatment, you may experience mild nausea. Nausea is often described as feeling sick to the stomach and can range from mild discomfort to the urge to vomit. If you vomit, seek medical attention. This not an expected side effect of HCV treatment. If you vomit your dose of HCV medication do not take another dose. Wait until your next scheduled dose is due.

To help manage an upset stomach, try to eat several small meals throughout the day instead of eating three big meals. Having an empty stomach or eating too much can cause discomfort. Nausea or vomiting can also lead to dehydration, so it's important to drink enough water. If your nausea continues, you should work with your doctor to find out what is making you nauseous and take steps to control it.

- ▶ Eat small meals throughout the day.
- ▶ Drink eight glasses of water per day.
- ▶ Eat a few crackers before getting up in the morning.
- ▶ Drink and eat slowly.
- ▶ Eat foods at room temperature.
- ▶ Keep windows open for fresh air.
- ▶ Avoid greasy, fried or spicy foods.
- ▶ Try to get plenty of rest.

Diarrhea and Constipation

People going through HCV treatment may experience mild diarrhea or constipation. Follow the tips below to help. Talk with your doctor or pharmacist about medications that you can take to help relieve these symptoms. Tell your doctor if your symptoms don't improve or become severe.

- ▶ Eat smaller meals.
- ▶ Drink plenty of fluids—water, sports drinks and juices at room temperature work best.
- ▶ Avoid foods that may upset your stomach, like milk products, spicy or fried foods, caffeinated drinks and carbonated beverages.
- ▶ Once you can eat solid foods, try foods low in fiber, like bananas, rice, toast or applesauce.
- ▶ Talk to your doctor before taking anything for diarrhea.

Anemia

Sometimes your therapy may require medication that can cause anemia. Anemia is when your blood lacks enough healthy red blood cells. People with severe anemia may experience:

- Tiredness & fatigue
- Trouble breathing
- Dizziness
- Coldness in hands and feet
- Chest pain
- Headache
- Pale skin

It's important to go to all scheduled lab appointments and keep in close contact with your doctor to manage this side effect. If you feel any of the above side effects, you should contact your doctor right away.

- ▶ Limit activities so you don't feel as tired.
- ▶ Ask loved ones to help you with things like child care, shopping, housecleaning or driving.
- ▶ Eat a well-balanced diet and drink a lot of water.



FAQs

What is Hepatitis C Virus (HCV)?

HCV is a disease caused by a virus that infects the liver and leads to scarring and liver damage or failure. It can also cause liver cancer. According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), an estimated 2.4 million people in the U.S. have HCV.

What are the symptoms of HCV?

When people first get HCV, they usually feel normal.

Symptoms of HCV may include:

- Tiredness
- Nausea or not wanting to eat
- Fever
- Soreness

What causes HCV?

HCV is caused by the hepatitis C virus. It is spread when blood containing the virus enters your blood stream. HCV is not spread by hugging, kissing, holding hands, coughing or sneezing. It can be spread by sharing needles or needle stick injuries or by being born to a mother with HCV. It can also be spread through sex or sharing personal items, like a razor or toothbrush.

What kind of treatments are there?

Treating HCV has greatly improved with new medications. Thanks to these new medications, it's now possible to cure HCV. Your doctor will decide which treatment option is best for you. Treatment may last 8 to 24 weeks depending on your specific condition. It's very important to take your medication exactly as instructed and not miss any doses for the best possible results.

During and after treatment, your doctor will check your blood regularly to be sure the virus is gone.

Are there side effects from the medication?

It's very important to tell your doctor and pharmacist all of the medications you are taking. This includes those purchased without a prescription, and any vitamins or herbal products so they can ensure the HCV medication is working the best it can.

While you are being treated for HCV, never take any new medications without checking with your doctor and pharmacist first. Always speak with a pharmacist or provider before consuming grapefruit juice, alcohol, milk thistle or smoking cigarettes.

Side effects of HCV treatment can include:

- Headache
- Tiredness
- Trouble sleeping
- Not wanting to eat
- Nausea
- Diarrhea or constipation

How do I manage these side effects?

Medication can affect each patient differently. Amber Specialty Pharmacy works with patients to help manage any side effects that occur. It's important to discuss any side effects that you experience with your pharmacist or doctor early.

What are the potential outcomes of treatment?

The goal of HCV treatment is for the infection to be cured. After treatment, your doctor will check your blood to see if the virus is gone. Once the virus is gone, be sure to follow your doctor's instructions for future follow-up appointments. If you still have HCV after treatment is completed, talk to your doctor about next steps.



Amber Specialty Pharmacy is here to help.

We offer guidance and support through our dedicated team of healthcare experts. From the beginning, we help you with the enrollment process and review your insurance coverage. We explore financial assistance opportunities to help you lower your medication costs whenever possible. Our pharmacists review your prescriptions with you - including how to take your medication and manage any side effects. Pharmacists are available 24/7 to assist you when you have questions. Our Registered Nurse and Registered Dietitian offer personalized consultations to assist you with any medically-based questions and nutritional care. We stay in touch with you regularly to remind you when it is time to refill your prescriptions. We are always here to help.

Additional Resources:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention - [Cdc.gov/hepatitis](https://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis)

American Liver Foundation - [liverfoundation.org](https://www.liverfoundation.org)

HCV Advocate - [hcvadvocate.org](https://www.hcvadvocate.org)

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