Hepatitis C
(Viral Infection of the Liver)

Hepatitis C is a viral infection of the liver similar to Hepatitis B (previously called serum hepatitis). This infection may go undetected for months or years because symptoms may be absent or be very mild and not lead a person to seek medical care until well after the infection actually began. Chronic liver disease is the main danger of Hepatitis C. This may lead to scarring of the liver (*cirrhosis*), liver failure and liver cancer.

CAUSES
This infection is now most commonly transmitted from person to person through intravenous drug use and abuse, sharing needles, or intimate sexual relationships with a hepatitis C-infected person.

SYMPTOMS
When symptoms are present, they may consist of:
- Mild fatigue.
- Darkening of the color of urine.
- Sometimes mild yellowing of the skin and eyes (*jaundice*). Jaundice occurs because of the build up of bile in the blood.

DIAGNOSIS
Diagnosis of active or chronic hepatitis C infection is made by testing blood for the presence of hepatitis C viral particles called RNA. Other tests to measure the status of current liver function, exclude other liver problems, or assess liver damage may also be done or advised.

TREATMENT
Drug treatment is available and recommended for patients with an increased risk of developing cirrhosis caused by the virus.

HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS
To avoid making your liver disease worse:
- Strictly avoid all alcohol beverage ingestion.
- Carefully review all new prescriptions of medicines with your doctors. Avoid drugs that are toxic to the liver. Some of these are:
  - Isoniazid.
  - Methyldopa.
  - Acetaminophen.
  - Anabolic steroids (muscle building drugs).
  - Erythromycin.
  - Oral contraceptives (birth control pills).
- Check with your caregiver to make sure medicine you are currently taking will not be harmful.
- Periodic blood tests may be required. Follow your caregiver's advice about when you should have blood tests.
- Avoid a physical/sexual relationship until advised otherwise by your caregiver.
- Avoid activities that could expose other persons to your blood. Examples include sharing a toothbrush, nail clippers, razors, and needles.
- Bed rest is not necessary. It may make you feel better. Recovery time is not related to the amount of rest you receive.

This infection is contagious. Follow the instructions in this section and any additional instructions from your caregiver to avoid spread of your infection to others.

SEEK MEDICAL CARE IF:

- You have increasing fatigue or weakness.
- An oral temperature above 102° F (38.9°C) develops, or as your caregiver suggests.
- You develop loss of appetite or have nausea and vomiting.
- You develop jaundice.
- You develop easy bruising or bleeding.

MAKE SURE YOU:

- Understand these instructions.
- Will watch your condition.
- Will get help right away if you are not doing well or get worse.

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