Hepatitis C

What is hepatitis C?
Hepatitis C is a liver disease caused by a virus which remains in your body for life. Some people have no symptoms and do not get sick. Some people may get scarring (*cirrhosis*) of the liver. This may cause liver failure. If that happens, the liver may not be able to do its usual jobs which are to:

- Help you fight infection.
- Help your blood clot when you are bleeding.
- Take wastes and poisons out of your blood.

How does hepatitis C spread?
It is spread when a person's blood or body fluids come in contact with the blood or body fluids of an infected person. Common ways in which Hepatitis C is spread are:

- Getting blood or blood products (plasma, red cells) infected with Hepatitis C.
- Getting an organ donation from an infected person.
- Sharing needles with an infected person.

Less often hepatitis C may be spread by:

- Having sex with an infected person.
- Sharing razors or toothbrushes with an infected person.
- Being born to an infected mother.

Hepatitis C is NOT spread by:

- Shaking hands, hugging or kissing.
- Breast-feeding.
- Coughing or sneezing.
- Sharing food, silverware or drinking from the same glass.

What are the symptoms of hepatitis C?

- Most patients have no symptoms.
- During the first months of infection, some people notice:
  - Feeling tired and weak.
  - Not wanting to eat.
  - Feeling sick to your stomach.
  - Throwing up.
  - Fever.
  - Dark pee.
  - The whites of the eyes and the skin may be yellow.
- After many months or years of infection, some people may still have no symptoms. Some people may notice:
  - Skin rashes.
  - Pain in the joints.
  - Feeling tired.
  - Swelling of the legs or belly.

How is hepatitis C treated?
There are some new medicines and treatments that may treat hepatitis C. You should discuss these with your doctor. You can help take care of your liver by:

- Not drinking alcohol (beer, wine or liquor).
- Eating a healthy diet (check with a dietitian).
- Getting enough rest and sleep.
- Checking with your doctor before taking any medicines, herbs, or food supplements.
- Keeping your appointments and taking your medicine the right way.
- In some cases of chronic infection, your doctor may have your blood checked to see if you should take an antiviral medicine.
- If your liver is badly damaged, you may need a liver transplant.

What if I am pregnant?

- Most babies born to Hepatitis C infected mothers do not become infected. The method of birth does not change the infection rate.
- Most of the babies who are infected at birth do not have symptoms. They may grow up without Hepatitis C problems.
- You should not breast-feed your baby if your nipples are cracked or bleeding.

How can I keep from spreading hepatitis C?

- Do not share needles, razors, toothbrushes, etc. with anyone else.
- Do not donate blood, body organs or any other body parts or fluids.
- Keep any cuts and sores on your body covered with bandages.
- Have safe sex by using or having your partner use a condom.

What other special things do I need to know?

- Get vaccinated against Hepatitis A and Hepatitis B if your doctor finds that you do not already have antibodies to these viruses.
- There is no vaccine against Hepatitis C.

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