Hepatitis

Hepatitis is a swelling (*inflammation*) of the liver. Common symptoms of this condition include fever, tiredness, poor appetite, nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain, dark urine and yellowing of the eyes and skin (*jaundice*). Hepatitis can be caused by several different viruses. Alcohol abuse, the use of certain drugs and toxic chemicals can also cause hepatitis. **Blood tests are often needed to find out which type of hepatitis you have. Measures can be taken to properly treat you and to protect your family and close contacts.** The most common types of hepatitis are:

HEPATITIS A: This type is picked up from contaminated food, water and from close personal contact. Hepatitis A is usually a mild illness with full recovery in 2 to 4 weeks. Most people only need supportive treatment at home:

- Rest.
- Fluids.
- A simple diet.
- A gradual return to normal activity and lifestyle as able.
- Do not drink alcohol until you are fully recovered.
- Avoid contact with susceptible people for 1 week, or until your caregiver says it is safe.

Family members and close contacts can prevent hepatitis by getting gamma globulin shots within 2 weeks of exposure. There are 2 vaccines available to prevent Hepatitis A (VAQTA and HAVRIX).

HEPATITIS B: This type was once called serum hepatitis. It is spread mainly by sexual contact, by sharing needles (*blood transfer*) and accidental exposure to an infected person's blood. Hepatitis B can be a very serious illness. Some patients develop a chronic infection or suffer permanent liver damage (*cirrhosis*). Treatment requires bed rest, a good diet and avoiding all drugs and alcohol. Sexual partners, and anyone exposed to an infected person's blood must get Hepatitis B immune globulin and vaccine to prevent the infection.

HEPATITIS C: This is also caused by a virus and transmitted by sexual and blood contact, like Hepatitis B. There is no vaccine and there is no known prevention except avoidance of contact. Other viruses (D, E, F, G) have also been shown to cause hepatitis.

Please see your caregiver for a follow-up exam as advised.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF:

- You can not keep fluids down and become dehydrated.
- You have increasing abdominal pain.
- You become drowsy or confused.
- You vomit blood or black material.
- You pass blood in the stool or the stool appears black.
- You feel faint, lightheaded or you pass out.

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