Hepatitis C May Have Silver Lining for Liver Transplant Patients

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People living with the hepatitis C virus (HCV) who need liver transplants may benefit from a silver lining to the virus. According to a new European study, the liver-damaging virus seems to successfully restrain a dangerous immune response that causes the body to reject new organs, Science Translational Medicine reports.

Hep C's effect allowed about half of a small group of liver transplant patients (17 out of 34) to stop taking immune-suppressant drugs after their operations. Doctors say these medicines can be particularly dangerous for a person living with hepatitis C because they cause the virus to rapidly accelerate in the body post-op.

In fact, new studies show that hepatitis C appears to help a liver transplant patient receive a new organ even better than immunosuppressive medications would. That's thanks to a common viral trick that hep C uses to avoid detection in the immune system, which re-wires immune cells to reduce their function.

However, doctors say they hope the findings will soon become a moot point thanks to new hepatitis C medications on the market today. Doctors hope those meds will eradicate the virus in patients before liver damage progresses to the point where a transplant is needed.

To read a full overview of the report on WebMD, click here.

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