Hepatitis C Medications: Antacid, Pregnancy Categories and Herbs

A review of hepatitis C treatment, focusing on pregnancy categories, antacids, and herbs.This article originally appeared in the HCV Advocate

August 17, 2015 By Alan Franciscus

I was recently looking on Facebook and the topic was antacids and Proton Pump Inhibitors. It was interesting because everyone had a different take on how and when to take them. As a result I thought I would talk about what they are, when it is safe to take them and a couple of other common topics such as—pregnancy categories and herbal supplements.

The current standard of care for treating hepatitis C by genotype includes:

- Genotype 1: Harvoni (sofosbuvir/ledipasvir) and Viekira Pak with and without ribavirin
- Genotype 2 and 3: Sovaldi (sofosbuvir) plus ribavirin
- Genotype 4: Sovaldi (sofosbuvir) plus pegylated interferon and ribavirin

The drugs listed above were approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). The approval process went through vigorous testing that included testing to find out what type of other drugs (drug-drug interactions) affected the absorption of the HCV medicines into the blood stream. This could change how well these drugs work and affect cure rates. This includes herbs since these can be considered a type of medicine. It is important to remember that herbs are not regulated.

Drug-Drug Interactions

- **Harvoni/Viekira Pak**: Proton Pump Inhibitors are drugs that work by reducing the amount of stomach acid made by glands in the lining of your stomach. The package label specifically lists omeprazole (Priolsec)—talk with your medical provider if you take this type of medication.
- **Harvoni**: Check with your medical provider if you take any acid reducing agents (antacids). There are specific times you can and can not take them.
- **Herbal Supplements**: Harvoni/Sovaldi/Viekira Pak: Do not take St. John's wort.

Note: People who are taking any protease inhibitor (HIV or HCV protease inhibitor) should not take St. John's wort). People taking Olysio should not take the herb Milk Thistle.

Note: Make sure to talk with your medical provider about any herb, supplement or medicine to make sure there is no drug-drug interaction. For information about liver toxic herbs see this edition of the HCV Advocate newsletter.

Pregnancy Categories

Harvoni, Sovaldi and Viekira Pak are classified as Pregnancy B drugs. This means that there have been no studies in humans and that they should only be used during pregnancy if the potential benefit justifies the potential risk to the fetus or if needed.

Ribavirin is a Pregnancy X drug and as such pregnancy has to be avoided. Women of child bearing potential and their male partners can not receive ribavirin unless they are using two forms of effective contraception during treatment with ribavirin and for six months after treatment has concluded.

Women should have a pregnancy test before starting treatment, during treatment and the six month period after treatment. Women are encouraged to sign up with the ribavirin registry.

Comment: If a woman is contemplating pregnancy most medical providers recommend HCV treatment first and starting a family afterwards. Talk with your medical provider about your options.

HCV Treatment FDA-Approved Prescribing Information

- Harvoni (sofosbuvir/ledipasvir) FDA-Approved Prescribing Information
- Harvoni (sofosbuvir/ledipasvir) Patient Information
- Sovaldi (Sofosbuvir) FDA-Approved Prescribing Information
- VIEKIRA PAK FDA-Approved Prescribing Information
- Ribavirin Warning!

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