Hep C Suppression Linked to Major Health Benefits

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Suppressing the hep C viral load—which is a precursor, although not necessarily a perfect predictor, of successful treatment—is associated with a diminished risk of liver disease and death. Researchers studied a sample of almost 29,000 people with hep C drawn from a Veterans Affairs database that includes medical records from 1999 onward. About a quarter of the sample had undergone treatment for the virus, with 16 percent achieving an undetectable viral load.

The researchers found that fully suppressing hep C lowered the risk of death by 45 percent and also lowered by 27 percent the combined risk of cirrhosis, decompensated cirrhosis, liver cancer and liver-related hospital admission.

While this study only looked at those treated with interferon and did not predict the benefits of an actual cure, the paper's lead author, Jeffrey McCombs, PhD, an associate professor at the University of Southern California, says, "The very good news is that the newer medications that are coming out are much more tolerable. The world in the future looks much better."

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