# Hepatitis C Survivor and His Dog Walk Nearly 25K Miles in 8 Years

That means the Alaskan man, who contracted hepatitis C in 1976, and his shi tzu walked a distance equal to a lap around the Earth.

September 23, 2021 By Trent Straube

---

Mike Mitchell would walk to the ends of the Earth for his dog, Chance. In a way, he already has. Nearly every day for the past two years, Mitchell, who survived a chronic hepatitis C infection, and his shih tzu have taken several lengthy walks together, and the distance sure has added up. They've completed about 3,000 miles a year, KTUU reports, and now they've covered over 24,901 miles—the equivalent of a lap around the Earth!

Mitchell, who lives in Anchorage, says he began tracking their steps on his Apple Watch in 2013. "I love to walk, and Chance loves to walk," he told the TV station. "So we walk together. We just walk every single day."

Mitchell, 68, credits Chance with saving his life. When he got his best friend in 2013, Mitchell was struggling with overweight and living with chronic hepatitis C, an inflammation of the liver. He had contracted the hep C virus via surgery in 1976.

Mitchell told KTUU that he participated in clinical trials to treat his hepatitis and had a successful treatment in 2018. "I carried [hepatitis C] for a long time, and most people didn't make it," Mitchell said. "But I was lucky." What's more, those daily walks with Chance helped him lose weight.

According to Hep's Basics section about hepatitis C, the virus is transmitted when the blood of an infected person passes into the blood of an uninfected person. Hep C is most easily spread through direct blood-to-blood contact, such as:

- Sharing needles and other equipment (paraphernalia) used to inject drugs. Injection drug users who share needles, syringes and paraphernalia associated with injecting are at the highest risk for HCV.

- Blood transfusions and organ transplants before July 1992. Widespread screening of the blood supply in the United States began in 1992.

- Sexual contact with someone who has HCV. The risk of becoming infected with hepatitis C through unprotected sexual intercourse is low, but it is still possible. HCV sexual transmission risk is higher among those who are HIV positive and in men who have sex with men. Sex with multiple partners, having a sexually transmitted disease and rough sex may increase the risk of transmitting HCV sexually.

- Having an HCV-positive mother. Women who are infected with hepatitis C have a 6% chance of passing the virus along to their babies during pregnancy or delivery. The risk increases significantly if the woman has HIV, hepatitis B or a high HCV viral load (the amount of HCV in a measurement of blood). The hepatitis C transmission risk is doubled or tripled in women with HIV. It is unlikely that hep C can be transmitted through breastfeeding or breast milk.

Hepatitis C treatment has improved immensely in the past decade. Today, the infection is curable, and the treatment is easier, shorter and safer than ever, often entailing daily tablets for 12 to 24 weeks. You can learn about it, including the various Food and Drug Administration–approved medications in our Hepatitis C Treatment section.

Mitchell found his companion via a Craigslist ad for shih tzu puppies in Wasilla. “He [Chance] was the most the beautiful one, and I was the first person there,” Mitchell told KTUU. “I said, ‘I’ll take him.’ Everything went so easily it was like something was ordered up by an unseen force.”

The two met right when Mitchell was looking for a new start. “I very quickly came to the conclusion I have to take another chance at this,” Mitchell said. “It just was the perfect name for this little dog. ‘He’s the second chance.’”

As a baby boomer, Mitchell had a higher risk of having hep C. In fact, three out of four people with chronic hepatitis C infection were born between 1945 and 1965. Baby boomers are five times more likely to have hepatitis C than adults born in other years. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends that people born during those years get a one-time blood test for hepatitis C.

That’s not the only risk factor for hepatitis. According to the Hepatitis C Transmission Basics, you

may be at risk for hepatitis C and should contact your health care provider for a blood test if you:

- Were born between 1945 and 1965, regardless of any other HCV-related risk factors;
- Were notified that you received blood or an organ from a donor who later tested positive for hepatitis C;
- Have ever injected drugs, even if you experimented only a few times many years ago;
- Received a blood transfusion or solid-organ transplant before 1992;
- Received a blood product for clotting problems before 1987;
- Have HIV;
- Have ever been on long-term kidney dialysis;
- Have evidence of liver disease (e.g., persistently abnormal liver function tests);
- Have an HCV-positive mother;
- Have been exposed to HCV through your occupation. (Note: The risk to health workers of acquiring HCV following a needlestick injury is quite low, averaging 1.8%.)

Although the risk is uncertain, you may also be at risk if you:

- Have ever gotten a tattoo or piercing in a nonprofessional setting where equipment, such as ink, inkwells or needles were used and potentially unsterilized;
- Have had multiple sexual partners or sexually transmitted diseases;

- Have ever inhaled cocaine or shared other non-injecting drugs.

Hepatitis C is not transmitted by casual contact, such as coughing, kissing, sneezing or sharing food, beverages or utensils.

Read our Hepatitis Introduction to learn about other forms of hepatitis—such as hep B—and liver diseases including non-alcoholic fatty liver disease (NAFLD), non-alcoholic steatohepatitis (NASH), alcohol-related liver disease, autoimmune hepatitis and primary biliary cholangitis (PBC).

In related news, see "Ask Hep: How important is it to walk 10,000 steps a day?"

---

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.
http://beta.docker.hepmag.com/article/hepatitis-c-survivor-dog-walk-nearly-25k-miles-8-years