



Living With Liver Disease

Disclosure

Dealing with a diagnosis of hepatitis or other type of liver disease includes making decisions about whom to tell, when to tell and what to tell others.

Although the choice to self-disclose is largely personal, there are moral and potential legal concerns to consider, particularly if you have knowingly exposed someone to hepatitis without revealing your status.

When you tell someone you have hepatitis, you may encounter ignorance, fear, discrimination or harsh judgment. People living with hepatitis may face stigma, in part because the disease is associated with injection drug use but also because the virus can be transmitted to others.

If you do decide to disclose that you are living with hepatitis, here are some suggestions to help you through the process:

- Know the risks of disclosure. People may be upset about this news. You may face discrimination. Relationships may change or end. Loved ones may worry about you. On the other hand, people may be supportive and offer to help.
- Before you tell others, be sure to know hepatitis is transmitted. People may want to know whether they are at risk of contracting the virus from you.
- Be prepared to answer questions. You may be asked how you got hepatitis. If you are uncomfortable with disclosing how you acquired it, then don't.
- Share information. Arm yourself with knowledge from websites, literature or other resources to help answer any further questions.
- You may ask the person to keep the information confidential, but some people aren't very good at keeping secrets. If you tell one person, be prepared for others to know.
- If privacy is important to you, do not post information about yourself in chat rooms or social

media. Use an alias, if you want to join a web-based group and still maintain a certain amount of anonymity.

After revealing that you are living with hepatitis, do not expect family and friends to digest the news instantly. Give them time to react and respond. Everyone does this at his or her own rate. If this process becomes prolonged or negatively affects your relationship, you may want to talk to a counselor, member of the clergy or other trusted adviser.

Your health care provider may not disclose your health status without your prior consent. The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) protects the information in your medical record. Your information may be shared with your insurance company if the insurer is paying for your care. Because health care professionals take precautions when handling blood and other body secretions, they are not at risk of acquiring hepatitis from you.

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<http://beta.docker.hepmag.com/basics/liver-health/disclosing-status>