How is Autoimmune Hepatitis Different from Hepatitis C

May 15, 2019 By Connie M. Welch

Autoimmune hepatitis and hepatitis C are similar but are different conditions.

Autoimmune Hepatitis
Autoimmune hepatitis is a disease where the body's immune system attacks the liver and causes inflammation which can lead to impairment of liver function. It is a chronic condition meaning it's ongoing, lasting for years.

Though it is not common for patients to have autoimmune hepatitis and hepatitis C at the same time, it can occur. It is important the patient see a physician who specializes in liver disease, like a hepatologist, or gastroenterologist.

25% of patients with an autoimmune disorder can develop other autoimmune disorders at the same time. If a patient has been tested for an autoimmune disorder, testing is recommended for other conditions.

There are two types of autoimmune hepatitis, type 1 (classic) is the most common. Type 1 can affect any age. Approximately 50% of the patients with autoimmune hepatitis have other autoimmune conditions, such as celiac disease, rheumatoid arthritis or ulcerative colitis or other conditions.

Type 2 is less common and generally affects children and young people.

Hepatitis C
Hepatitis C is caused by a virus that attacks the liver and causes liver damage leading to loss of liver function. If left untreated hepatitis C can lead to other serious conditions like cirrhosis, cancer, and liver failure.

The hepatitis C virus is typically seen in patients in the baby boomer age group, but younger patients are also affected. Certain risk factors are related to the cause of hepatitis C for people of all ages.

Early diagnosis and treatment of hepatitis C can reduce liver damage. Depending on the level of liver damage and the severity of scarring, the liver can regenerate healthy liver tissue.

Symptoms of Autoimmune Hepatitis & Hepatitis C

Symptoms of autoimmune hepatitis and hepatitis C are very similar and can vary from person to person. Some people show signs of symptoms while others show no symptoms until liver damage is present. General symptoms include:

- Fatigue
- Abdominal Discomfort
- Yellowing of the skin and whites of the eyes (jaundice)
- Enlarged liver
- Abnormal blood vessels on the skin
- Skin Rashes
- Joint pain
- For autoimmune hepatitis C, there can be a loss of menstrual periods
- For hepatitis C, a general not feeling well, flu-like symptoms can sometimes be seen

Treatment for Autoimmune Hepatitis

There is no cure for autoimmune hepatitis C but there are treatments to help reduce the body's attack on the liver and suppress the immune system.

If autoimmune hepatitis goes untreated it can lead to cirrhosis, and liver failure.

Treatment for Hepatitis C

There is a cure for the hepatitis C virus (HCV). A wide variety of treatment for hepatitis C is available for all genotypes (virus strains), and liver conditions with shorter treatment time, less side effects and a high cure rate of 95% to 99% for most cases.

Have you been tested and diagnosed with either Autoimmune Hepatitis or Hepatitis C? Do you know what you have been tested for? Share your comments below.

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