Explaining Acute and Chronic Hepatitis C

Hepatitis C is caused by a virus in the blood that primarily attacks the liver and causes inflammation leading to progressive liver damage.

February 1, 2021 By Connie M. Welch

Liver damage from hepatitis C can lead to scarring of liver tissue causing compromised liver function, which can progress to severe scarring (cirrhosis). This makes the patient at high risk for liver cancer and liver failure. Hepatitis C is the leading cause of liver transplants in the U.S.

There are two types or phases of hepatitis C, acute and chronic. Hepatitis C is known as a silent disease. In most cases of acute and chronic hepatitis C, the patient does not experience any symptoms and does not know they have hepatitis C for a long time.

Acute Hepatitis C

Acute means you have had the hepatitis C virus in your blood for a short time, between a few weeks to less than 6 months. Blood work can show that you are positive for hepatitis C antibodies, meaning your immune recognizes a virus in the blood.

For unknown reasons, The World Health Organization reports that approximately 30 percent of people who clear the hepatitis C virus are in the acute phase without treatment.

Chronic Hepatitis C

Of people infected with hepatitis C, 70 percent develop a chronic condition meaning, long-term. The only way to rid the body of chronic hepatitis C is with improved treatment with direct-acting antiviral medication. There are a variety of improved treatments available.

Treatment for Hepatitis C

Improved treatment with direct-acting antivirals can be done in as little as 8 to 12 weeks. Improved treatments have a high cure rate of 90 to 95 percent. Treatments have fewer side effects than older treatments. The most common treatment side effects are headache and fatigue.

Which treatment is right for each patient will be determined by genotype (virus strain), viral load, liver condition, and overall medical condition (depending on associated conditions).

Once treatment is completed after 12 weeks you will have a specialized blood test to determine if

hepatitis C is present in the blood, if it shows Non-detected, you are considered cured.

It is important to note that treatment can cure the hepatitis C virus but it does not cure severe liver scarring (cirrhosis). Early treatment can help prevent further liver damage from occurring.

In Summary

Hepatitis C testing is recommended for all age groups, especially those 18 and older. If someone tests positive, seek the care of a liver specialist like a hepatologist, gastroenterologist, or infectious disease specialist. These doctors specialize in the care and treatment of liver disease. Seek treatment as soon a possible to avoid liver damage.

Have you been tested for hepatitis C? Do you have a question or concern?

Share your comments below.

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