Hepatitis B Symptoms & Testing

Hepatitis B is a viral infection that attacks the liver and does liver damage. Be proactive with understanding symptoms and testing.

September 25, 2019 By Connie M. Welch

Hepatitis B can be contacted in various ways, primarily from body fluids, blood or blood type products which are infected with hepatitis B to someone who is not infected. It is also possible to be infected with one or more types of hepatitis at the same time (co-infection).

Symptoms from hepatitis B can vary depending on how long you've been infected. Signs and symptoms can begin to develop within 2 weeks to 4 months or longer from the time of infection. Symptoms can vary from mild to severe. Not all symptoms may be experienced and can be masked as a general run-down feeling or flu.

Symptoms

- Abdominal pain
- Dark urine
- Fever
- Joint pain
- Loss of appetite
- Nausea and vomiting
- Weakness and fatigue
- Yellowing of your skin and the whites of your eyes (jaundice)

Acute or Chronic

The hepatitis B infection can be either be acute (lasting a short period), or chronic (long-lasting).

*Acute hepatitis B can last less than six months. The person's immune system can sometimes clear hepatitis B from the body with a full recovery within a few months. Majority of people with hepatitis B as adults can have an acute infection, but in some cases can lead to a chronic infection doing liver damage.

*Chronic hepatitis B can last six months or longer. If the person's immune system is not able to fight off and clears the infection, the infection becomes chronic which can lead to serious liver damage. Treatment is recommended to reduce liver damage.

Children have a higher risk of hepatitis B becoming chronic but can go undetected for a long time while doing liver damage.

Testing

Testing can determine if you have hepatitis B and its severity.

- Blood tests will determine if you have antibodies of the hepatitis B virus and if it's acute or chronic.
- Fibroscan which is a non-invasive, special ultrasound called transient elastography can show the amount of liver damage or scarring that is present in your liver.
- Liver Biopsy may be done if your physician feels this is necessary. A liver biopsy helps determine the structural condition of the liver.

It is recommended to see a liver specialist like a hepatologist or gastroenterologist who specializes in liver disease and treatment.

The best and first proactive step against hepatitis B and risk of co-infection is to be tested and get vaccinated for hepatitis B. Don't assume your physician or hospital has tested you for any type of hepatitis. This is not part of routine blood work. Talk to your physician and ask to be tested and get the vaccine.

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