Hepatitis C Treatment and Cirrhosis

August 16, 2017 By Connie M. Welch

Hepatitis C patients who also have cirrhosis, often ask many questions about liver regeneration, medications, diet and alcohol. Here are 4 common questions and answers about Hepatitis C treatment and cirrhosis.

For Hepatitis C patients who have completed Hep C treatment and received a cure, the Hep C virus has been eliminated which means no further damage to the liver is being done by the virus. But what about liver damage from cirrhosis?

4 Common Questions about Hepatitis C Treatment and Cirrhosis:

- Does my liver regenerate and heal after my Hep C treatment?
- What about Hep C patients who are taking medications for complications from cirrhosis, do you stop these after you complete your Hep C treatment?
- How important is my diet with cirrhosis?
- Can I drink alcohol now that I'm cured from Hep C even though I have cirrhosis?

Does my liver regenerate and heal after my Hep C treatment?
The National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Disease state, "The liver can regenerate most of its own cells when they become damaged. However, if injury to the liver is too severe or long lasting, regeneration is incomplete, and the liver creates scar tissue."

The Mayo Clinic describes Cirrhosis as "late stage of scarring (fibrosis) of the liver caused by many forms of liver diseases and conditions, such as hepatitis and chronic alcohol abuse. The liver carries out several necessary functions, including detoxifying harmful substances in your body, cleaning your blood and making vital nutrients.

Cirrhosis occurs in response to damage to your liver. The liver damage done by cirrhosis can't be undone. But if liver cirrhosis is diagnosed early and the cause is treated, further damage can be limited. As cirrhosis progresses, more and more scar tissue forms, making it difficult for the liver to function (decompensated cirrhosis). Advanced cirrhosis is life-threatening."

Eliminating the body of the Hep C virus stops further damage from occurring in the liver, but Hep C

treatment medication does not heal the liver from cirrhosis (severe scarring). The degree of liver regeneration will depend on the severity of scarring present.

A certain amount of regeneration may occur but tests like a Liver Biopsy or Fibroscan will help diagnose the liver's structural damage. In most cases severe scarring is not reversed but there are medications and diet recommendations to help the patient with complications from cirrhosis. Clinical studies are currently being done on cirrhosis and liver regeneration.

What about Hep C patients who are taking medications for complications from cirrhosis, do you stop these after you complete your Hep C treatment?
No. Some common medications taken for complications from cirrhosis are Xifaxan which is an antibiotic for the GI tract and lactulose, a strong laxative which helps to eliminate high ammonia levels from the body and keep them down. Depending on each patient's condition, the physician may prescribe different or additional medications.

Stopping any medication the doctor has prescribed for cirrhosis complications can be serious. Never stop medications unless your physician instructs you to do so.

How important is my diet with cirrhosis?
Diet is a key part in helping your liver function better especially if you have severe scarring from cirrhosis. Cirrhosis can lead to complications such as Hepatic Encephalopathy (HE) or mental confusion known as brain fog, Ascites which is fluid build up in the abdomen, and other complications like portal hypertension, etc… Diet and medications can help minimize side effects of these conditions.

If you have cirrhosis, ask your physician for a referral to a registered dietitian, who can create a diet specific to your needs. Cirrhosis can hinder the body's use of nutrients and can lead to malnutrition. So a low sodium, balanced protein diet is generally the best guideline, but a registered dietitian will be able to guide you based on your specific medical condition.

Can I drink alcohol now that I'm cured from Hep C even though I have cirrhosis?
Alcohol especially for patients with cirrhosis is very damaging to the liver. The functions of the liver are compromised from liver damage and for patients who drink alcohol the damage accelerates. Liver specialist's often refer to this has "throwing gasoline on a fire." It's not worth it. Don't make the condition worse.

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