Alcohol and Hepatitis C

Your questions answered.

December 23, 2020 By Connie M. Welch

Is drinking alcohol safe for patients who have Hepatitis C? How does alcohol effect Hepatitis C? Does alcohol effect hepatitis C treatment and recovery? These are important questions Hep C patients ask when seeking how to take care of themselves while fighting Hepatitis C.

Is drinking alcohol safe for patients who have Hepatitis C?

The American Liver Foundation states there is no evidence any amount of alcohol is safe for people with Hepatitis C. The Hepatitis C virus (HCV) causes inflammation and damages liver cells compromising the function of the liver. Alcohol use can accelerate liver damage. The combination of alcohol use and Hepatitis C can cause significant liver damage which if continues can cause cirrhosis (permanent scarring of the liver). Liver specialist's (Hepatologist and Gastroenterologist) widely recommend Hepatitis C patients avoid drinking alcohol.

Dr. Hyder Jamal M.D. a gastroenterologist at the St. Jude Medical Center in Yorba Linda, California says, having the Hepatitis C infection "is like having a low brush fire in your liver, and drinking alcohol has the effect of sprinkling kerosene on it."

How does alcohol effect Hepatitis C?

The Veterans Administration medical report on Alcohol and Hepatitis states, "alcohol is a potent toxin to the liver especially with patients who have hepatitis c infection. Hepatitis C impairs the liver's natural function of breaking down alcohol and removing toxic by-products. As a result, the toxins in alcohol are not removed completely and remain within the body, creating a toxic environment." Hepatitis C patients who drink alcohol are at a higher risk of increased damage to the liver leading to cirrhosis, cancer and liver failure. Alcohol speeds up the development of cirrhosis.

The Veterans Administration medical report on Alcohol and Hepatitis C states, "the more drinks a person has per week, the more viral load he or she will tend to have."

How does Alcohol effect Hepatitis C Treatment and Recovery?

Alcohol puts strain on the liver not only weakening the immune system, but the harder the liver has to work to process alcohol results in compromised function and fighting off hepatitis virus cells. In essence alcohol weakens your chances of success with hepatitis C treatment. It has been

stated that a period of drinking prior to treatment greatly increases the odds of treatment being effective.

It is important to note that even after Hepatitis C treatment is completed, it is best to refrain from drinking in order to give the liver time to recover and regenerate if the patient has mild liver damage. Patients who have completed Hepatitis treatment who have severe damage (cirrhosis) should not drink alcohol at all.

The best advice is to avoid alcohol altogether, the danger and effects are not worth the risk. Remember, alcohol is alcohol which means beer, wine, and any liquor products. Diluting any alcohol with soda does not lessen the harmful effects on the liver.

Be safe, refrain. If you have been diagnosed with Hepatitis C or any other liver disease, stop drinking and seek treatment for Hepatitis C. Taking care of your liver effects the quality of your life.

If you are having problems giving up drinking talk to your physician about help and seek to follow these strategies;

- Keep a drinking diary and note what and how much you are drinking along with your emotions and what is going on socially when you drink. Work on changing your behavior and come up with specific ways to replace drinking and social activity that involves drinking with other activities. Give yourself target goals to reach each week and keep going.
- Learn to say No: Remember your health is at stake. Don’t compromise what is best for you.
- Stay Active
- Seek professional help
- Get Support
- Watch out for temptations. Be prepared and make a plan, then stick to the plan.
- Don’t give up. You matter. You’re worth it!

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