Liver Facts and Hepatitis C

September 21, 2016 By Connie M. Welch

What is the function of the liver?

The liver is a vital organ, meaning you need it in order to sustain life. It's the second largest organ in your body. It is located under the rib cage on the right side of your abdomen. It weighs about three pounds and is shaped like a football that is flat on one side.

The liver performs many functions in your body. It's primary function is to process everything you eat, drink, breathe and absorb through your skin. It serves your body like an engine, filter, refinery plant, and storage house. It converts nutrients from your food for vital functions for muscles, energy, hormones, clotting factors and immune factors.

It stores vitamins, minerals (including iron) and sugars, regulates fat stores, and controls the production and excretion of cholesterol. It also produces bile which helps you digest food and absorb nutrients.

It detoxifies poisonous substances and metabolizes alcohol. It aids your immune system by helping you resist infection and removes bacteria from your blood. It's your body's power house.

What is Hepatitis C?

The term Hepatitis means inflammatory or infection of the liver which can be caused by chemicals, drugs or viruses. Hepatitis C is often referred to as Hep C or HCV (hepatitis c virus).

There are six Hepatitis viruses labeled A through E and G. Viruses A and E can be contracted from feces due to poor hygiene, or contaminated water or food. Hepatitis B and D are transmitted by bodily fluids including blood exposure into the bloodstream.

Hepatitis C is transmitted when blood infected with Hep C comes in contact to the bloodstream of an un-infected person. Hepatitis G virus also termed GBV-C was recently discovered and resembles HCV, but more closely, the flaviviruses; the virus and its effects are under investigation, and its role in causing disease in humans is unclear.

The World Health Organization reports there are 11 genotypes of Hep C with distinct subtypes identified throughout the world. Certain genotypes are prevalent in certain countries and some specific to certain countries.

Within the Hepatitis C virus there are 7 different genotypes (virus strains) of Hep C. Genotype refers to the genetic structure or particular virus strain. Within genotype there are subtypes. It is important to know which genotype the patient has in order to determine the right treatment regimen best effective for each patient.

Worldwide, the most common is genotype 1 which accounts for 46% of cases. In the United States 75% of Hep C patients have genotype 1. Genotypes 2, 3, and 4 are less common in the US and other genotypes are rare. Genotype 7 was discovered in 2013 with only one known case.

Heavy alcohol use, toxins, and certain medical conditions can also cause hepatitis. Hepatitis C is caused by a virus that attacks the liver causing damage and function impairment.

When first infected, a person can develop what is known as an “acute” infection, which can range in severity from very mild with few or no symptoms to a serious condition or chronic condition. Acute means a short term illness that lasts within a short amount of time, normally 6 months or less. Chronic means a condition which lasts over 6 month or longer, an ongoing condition.

According to the Center of Disease Control and Prevention, 15%-25% of people “clear” the Hep C virus without treatment. Approximately 75 to 85% of people who become infected with the Hepatitis C virus develop “chronic” or long term infection.

Chronic Hepatitis C can lead to serious liver damage including liver function impairment, liver scarring from fibrosis to severe permanent scarring (cirrhosis), liver cancer or liver failure. The Hepatitis C virus is one of the highest causes of chronic liver disease and liver transplants in the United States. It is estimated that over 4 million Americans have chronic Hepatitis C (HCV).

Worldwide, approximately 175 million people have Hep C. Most people do not know they are infected. It is known as the “silent killer” due to symptoms not appearing for some time and often mask other conditions.

Hep C is treatable and beatable. With practicing good healthy habits and treatment for Hep C, you can help your liver function better. Cure rates with medical treatment are now 90% to 99%. Common treatment length for Hep C is 8 to 12 weeks.

Have you been tested for Hep C? What is your genotype? Have you done treatment for Hep C?

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