

a series of fact sheets written
by experts in the field of liver
disease

HCV Treatment Side Effect Management: Diarrhea

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Diarrhea is defined as loose or watery stools that occur three or more times a day.

Diarrhea can be caused by many factors, including bacterial and viral infections, drugs, certain foods or beverages, anxiety, chemo-therapy as well as from interferon and ribavirin treatment.

Regular diarrhea may last for 1 or 2 days and will generally improve on its own. However, diarrhea that lasts longer than 2 days can cause problems and should be taken seriously.

Symptoms

The hallmark of diarrhea is watery stools, but other symptoms can occur such as cramping, bloating, pain, and nausea. In severe cases a person may have a fever or bloody stools.

Diarrhea can greatly affect health and adherence to treatment so it is important to be as proactive as possible in treating diarrhea as soon as the symptoms appear. Diarrhea can lead to dehydration and reduced quality of life, as well as contribute to nutrient deficiencies.

Notify your medical provider immediately if you have any of the following:

- Severe diarrhea that lasts longer than two days
- Dramatic weight loss that occurs in one day (5 lbs or more)
- Blood in the stool or around the anal area
- Black stools
- Uncontrolled fever, fever higher than 102 F, or fever that lasts more than 24 hours
- Severe stomach or intestinal cramping

Managing Diarrhea

There are many steps that can be taken to help control diarrhea. Diarrhea can lead to severe dehydration so one of the most important steps that people should take is to make sure they are well-hydrated by drinking adequate amounts of water.

Try these simple suggestions as soon as you feel that diarrhea is starting:

- Drink clear fluids, such as water, weak tea, broth (vegetable, chicken and beef), popsicles, gelatin
- Eat small frequent meals - eat bland foods
- Keep track of bowel movements
- Eat foods that are high in potassium, such as bananas and potatoes

Avoid these foods and vegetables:

- High fiber foods, such as whole grain breads and cereals
- Milk and dairy products
- Spicy, fried and greasy foods
- Pork, veal, salmon and sardines
- Raw vegetables
- Raw fruits

- Caffeinated drinks
- Alcoholic beverages
- Tobacco products
- Hot or cold foods and beverages

If diarrhea improves, start eating small amounts of easily digestible foods, such as those listed in the BRAT diet:

- **B**ananas
- **R**ice
- **A**pplesauce
- **T**oast

Talk with a medical provider about other foods to eat once the diarrhea has started to get better, including noodles, yogurt, weak tea, crackers, and chicken stock.

Care

Diarrhea can make the area around the anus dry and chafed. After a bowel movement wash and rinse the area around the anus with warm soapy water or baby wipes and pat dry with a soft tissue or cloth. Apply a water repellent cream around the anal area to help with possible pain, irritation and discomfort. A warm sitz bath (sitting in a bathtub filled with warm water) may help to relieve some of the pain and discomfort as well as help you to relax.

Severe diarrhea should be reported to your medical provider immediately. Your provider may recommend an over-the-counter medication like Immodium, and/or prescribe medication to treat diarrhea. Never self medicate.

Controlling diarrhea is another important part of taking care of yourself while on treatment. It will ensure that you stay healthy and feel better, and it will help maximize HCV medical treatment outcome.


Be Sure to Check Out the Other Factsheets in This Series: “HCV Treatment – Side Effect Management”

- A Guide to Hepatitis C: Treatment Side Effect Management
- Managing Side Effects of HCV Treatment
- Side Effect Management: Anxiety, Mania, and Depression
- Side Effect Management: Dental Hygiene
- Side Effect Management: Depression
- Side Effect Management: Depression—For Family and Friends
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- Side Effect Management: Neutropenia
- Side Effect Management: Rashes
- Side Effect Management: Taste Changes
- Side Effect Management: Water
- Side Effect Management: Weight Loss

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