

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

HCV Treatment Side Effect Management: Maintaining a Positive Attitude

Alan Franciscus, Editor-in-Chief

HCV THERAPY IS NOT EASY FOR MANY PEOPLE.

The side effects that people experience on therapy range from mild to severe. In addition to the physical side effects, one may experience a multitude of psychological problems that can be triggered by interferon and ribavirin. In order to get through therapy, sometimes it is simply a matter of equipping yourself with the necessary tools and strategies.

Maintaining a positive attitude while on treatment may be difficult, but it is essential and should be at the top of your list for side effect management. Although there is no scientific data at this time to support the notion that a positive attitude will have an impact on hepatitis C or treatment outcome, many patients report that attitude was an important part of staying on therapy. Strive to maintain a positive attitude, but it would be unrealistic to assume that you will achieve perfection 100% of the time. The point is that a positive attitude is a process and not the goal. Be realistic and don't set yourself up for failure because this is the time that you need to be gentle with yourself.

Attitude

How do you maintain a positive attitude? There are many steps you can take. For example, before beginning therapy write a list of the reasons why you are being treated and read the list often.

Reasons to undergo therapy are:

- To improve health
- Live longer

- To feel that you have done all that you can do
- To be alive for your children, grandchildren and loved ones
- To experience life and all it has to offer
- To simply get rid of the virus
- To put the treatment or hepatitis C behind you
- To have children
- To reduce symptoms and increase quality of life
- To help reach personal and professional goals
- To avoid being a burden to others

Starting the day off with a positive attitude is half the battle. When you wake up in the morning try to think of one thing you are grateful for in your life. **Examples:**

- I feel grateful that I have the opportunity to take this treatment
- I am grateful for the people in my life
- I am grateful I have a roof over my head or a bed to sleep in at night

Try restructuring your thought processes. **For example:**

- Instead of saying "I'm overwhelmed," say and believe "I am doing the best that I can"
- If you find yourself thinking "I'm tired," try saying to yourself "This will eventually pass"
- When you say "I can't do this," try saying "I can do this because it is only temporary"

In the evening when you are going to sleep, look back at your day and define what made you feel better and what made you feel worse. Congratulate yourself for getting through the day! Remind yourself that you are one more day closer to completing treatment and your goal.

Support

Staying positive while on therapy would be almost impossible if a person did not have a very good support system established and in place well before starting therapy. Support from as many areas as possible is critical. Support comes in many forms, including family, friends, co-workers, and from peers found in support groups. If you do not already attend a support group, consider joining one before starting therapy.

Personal Appearance

Keeping a positive attitude requires that you take really good

care of your body, including your appearance. When you look good you generally feel better. If you wake up in the morning and feel achy and out of sorts generally, it will help you feel better if you take the necessary steps to stay well groomed. Starting your day off feeling fresh will create a positive influence on your emotions for the entire day.

Try these strategies:

- Shower or bathe daily. Spoil yourself with bathing products that smell and feel good. Light a candle and listen to soothing music
- Take care of the hands and nails
- Moisturize, moisturize, moisturize!
- Consider getting a different hair style that would be attractive, easy to take care of and flattering in case there is hair loss
- Brush and floss your teeth regularly
- Men - shower and shave or trim facial hair
- Women - if you regularly use make-up, then continue while on treatment
- Get dressed even if you will be laying on the couch (wear comfortable clothing)
- Wear colors that make you feel good

Exercise

Exercise is one of the most important components of health maintenance, even on therapy. It will help you stay positive, focused and improve your general well-being. Moderation is the key to physical activity. Exercise comes in many forms and does not mean that you have to spend an enormous amount of money or run a marathon to stay fit.

Examples:

- Stretching
- Walking
- Hula-hooping
- Swimming
- Yoga
- Pilates

Relaxation

Being on HCV medication is stressful. Trying to remember to take all of the medications, dealing with side effects, a job and family can greatly overwhelm most people. It is important that people build in relaxation strategies. Try some of these to help you with relaxing:

- Meditation—try saying “may I be well” while you take a deep breath, say “may others be well” when you exhale
- Prayer—practice your spiritual preference at least once a day
- Light a candle and listen to music
- Many people hold their breath when they are stressed out. During these periods try gently breathing in and out
- Sit or walk in a place of natural beauty, such as a beach, garden, or park

Social Events


Treatment-related side effects and the everyday demands of life can create some uncertainty. Maintain a social life but be realistic when scheduling dates or appointments. The surest way to become depressed is to isolate yourself from family and friends. However, it is important to talk with family and friends before starting treatment so that they can be supportive if you need to cancel or adjust any plans. Sometimes just the knowledge that you can cancel or leave a social activity early will help to reduce the stress. Relax and enjoy the time spent with family and friends.

Daily strategies

Engage in activities that make you laugh. Choose movies that are comedies rather than movies with painful themes. Read the comics, watch sitcoms, use humor - use it during the difficult moments to get a better prospective. Indulge in a favorite hobby, but, most of all, learn to pamper yourself.

For more information about hepatitis C, hepatitis B and HCV coinfections, please visit www.hcvadvocate.org.

• *hcspFACTsheet* •
A publication of the Hepatitis C Support Project

Executive Director Editor-in-Chief, HCSP Publications Alan Franciscus	The information in this fact sheet is designed to help you understand and manage HCV and is not intended as medical advice. All persons with HCV should consult a medical practitioner for diagnosis and treatment of HCV.
Design Paula Fener	
Production C.D. Mazoff, PhD	This information is provided by the Hepatitis C Support Project • a nonprofit organization for HCV education, support and advocacy • © 2007 Hepatitis C Support Project • Reprint permission is granted and encouraged with credit to the Hepatitis C Support Project.
Contact information: Hepatitis C Support Project PO Box 427037 San Francisco, CA 94142-7037 alanfranciscus@hcvadvocate.org	
 HCV ADVOCATE www.hcvadvocate.org	