



## TAYLOR TIDBITS

# HEPATITIS AWARENESS WEEK

**July 27 – August 2, 2015**

Hepatitis Awareness Week is a campaign conducted annually by several organizations and health agencies to encourage people suffering from hepatitis B and hepatitis C across the globe while creating awareness. The campaign which will start from July 27, to August 2, is on the seventh year in trying to raise awareness of viral hepatitis and hepatitis issues like liver inflammation that are affecting over 5 million Americans of all ages with the majority going undiagnosed. Hepatitis can lead to liver failure, cirrhosis, or cancer if untreated.

The main purpose of hepatitis awareness week is to inform the public about the importance of getting tested for hepatitis B and hepatitis C, ensure availability of treatment facilities and professionals, request grants for more research and fund studies aiming to curb the disease. The Australian Government doesn't fund hepatitis treatment, but several organizations will help patients living with the disease have access to antiviral therapies. The campaign is also encouraging patients to ask doctors about the changing treatments in order to ensure that they take advantage of new drugs, which work faster without requiring injections, are easier to use and have minimal side effects.

Hepatitis is a serious viral disease that can be easily spread and can be fatal if untreated. Most people who get infected go undiagnosed especially if it doesn't develop serious symptoms. The disease may occur with limited or no symptoms and can lead to discoloration of the skin (jaundice). Hepatitis can be transmitted through blood and bodily fluids. You are at risk of hepatitis infection if you are in a job that exposes you to human blood, receive blood transfusion, have hemophilia, or do injection drugs. Hepatitis is curable and treatment involves bed rest, avoiding alcohol and taking medications for relieving symptoms. In case of liver failure due to hepatitis, a patient can undergo transplant. Prevention measures include vaccination, observing proper hygiene, protected sex, drinking boiled or purified water, and avoiding sharing needles or personal items like tooth brushes, razors, or nail clippers with an infected person.

Hepatitis awareness week is a great opportunity where people can exchange ideas on how to prevent and treat this condition that affects the liver. By raising awareness, it will go a long way in making the public conscious about the existence of this highly infectious and life-threatening condition that most people aren't familiar with, yet millions are infected around the world. The good news is that by observing simple measures, hepatitis can be prevented. With the continuous change in treatment drugs and vaccines, it is very important to ask your doctor the best and convenient medication if you become infected with hepatitis. Go for regular screening if you are prone to hepatitis.

Hepatitis virus is a versatile virus that inflames the liver. It can be transmitted through a number of ways, and not all strands of hepatitis are lethal. The liver is the second largest organ in the human body, preceded by the skin (yes, the skin is an organ). It handles certain processes when dealing with substances that you consume, and helps in creating waste from these substances, as well as building cells. Among the processes of the liver: it creates urine; digests harmful substances (like alcohol), creates red blood cells; helps regulate the glucose level within the body and creates certain amino acids, which are the building blocks of the cells. As you can see, the liver is very important is vital to our survival.

## Signs and Symptoms

Although hepatitis virus comes in various strains, its signs and symptoms are often similar. There are two phases to the virus:

- The first phase is called the acute phase. The symptoms in this phase are akin to a mild flu there's: diarrhea, fatigue, loss of appetite, mild fever, muscle or joint aches, nausea, slight abdominal pain, vomiting and weight loss. This acute phase usually lasts about 15 to 180s days after the person has become infected. If these symptoms persist or develop further, it can lead to death.
- As one feels worse, they can move into the second part of the symptoms, which usually happens as the virus becomes more engrained in your system. The outcome of the infected individual after this phase depends largely on the type of hepatitis virus and other various factors. The symptoms of the second part include: circulation problems, dark urine, dizziness, drowsiness, enlarged spleen, headache, hives, and itchy skin, light colored feces (that may contain pus) and jaundice.

## Causes and Risk Factors

There aren't many ways to catch hepatitis, but the main way to catch it is the transmission of fluids from an infected host (that can be inanimate or not) to an uninfected individual. Each method of infection is specific to that type of hepatitis viral strain.

- Types A and E can be caught through drinking water or food contamination.
- Types B and E can be caught through anal or oral sex while type B can also be transmitted through any kind of intimate sexual activity.
- Type C can only be caught through the direct contact of infected blood while type C and type B can be caught by misuse of anesthesia.
- Type G is a caused by a specific virus and type X has an unknown mode of transmission.
- D is an advanced form of strain B and can only be gained in the same way strain B is contracted.

## Types

The different types of hepatitis are A, B, C, D, E, G and X.

- Type A is usually contracted by eating infected food or water; or by having anal or oral sex. This type isn't usually lethal and most people make a full recovery afterwards without it leading to a chronic illness.
- Hepatitis B is one of the main ones people usually hear about. It is an STD (sexually transmitted disease) that can be contracted via anal, vaginal or oral unprotected sex (without a condom), having your skin perforated with an unsterilized needle; a baby can become infected by drinking milk from an infected tit, and you can also get it by being bitten by someone with the virus.
- Hepatitis C is another infamous strain of the virus. This can be contracted via infected blood or misuse of synesthesia. There is an increased risk among people with cirrhosis.
- Hepatitis D is an evolved form of B and can only be contracted by someone that already has Hepatitis B. In all forms of hepatitis the liver swells. This can either be a good or bad thing depending on a variety of factors.
- Hepatitis B, C, and D can lead to death in serious cases.

## Tests and Diagnosis

Testing for any Hepatitis is done through a blood test. Your physician would inform you after a standard physical (usually that is where one takes a blood test) to tell you if you've somehow contracted the virus.

## **Treatments and Medications**

There isn't any standard treatment for strains A, D, E, X or G.

- For strain B, a high protein diet and rest serves as treatment as well as prescriptions such as interferon, an antiviral agent.
- A person with Hepatitis C can be prescribed a different type of interferon as well as riboflavin; although the use of interferon for treatment in Hepatitis C strands is contested.
- For people that have contracted a non-viral strand of hepatitis, the harmful substance is usually flushed out. If the virus was contracted via a drug-induced treatment, corticosteroids are usually prescribed.

## **Precaution and Self-Care**

If you are worried about contracting hepatitis or just want to know how to prevent it, there are steps you can take. For strains A and E, one would be leery of any food or drink that may be contaminated. For strains B and C, use a condom when having sex, don't share needles, try not to drink a lot of alcohol, and cover open wounds if you are infected. For strain D, follow the precautions of strain B and for strain E do the same precaution for strain A. For all other strains, go easy on the alcohol. For drug and toxic induced hepatitis virus strains, watch out for chemicals, wear protective gear and make sure whatever is being expelled is not pointing nor makes contact with you.

If you become infected with any form of hepatitis, the following tips can be helpful towards the recovery process:

- Avoid engaging in strenuous physical activity and get adequate bed rest.
- Avoid alcohol or get your doctor's consent if you must drink.
- Reduce your workload if you feel tired.
- Gradually resume your regular activities soon after you start feeling better. Going back to your regular activity soon after recovery can worsen hepatitis symptoms.
- Eat a well-balanced diet even if you lose appetite or feel nauseated. However, don't consume heavy meals but instead take lighter foods in the morning and later in the day.
- Go for a hepatitis test at least once a year.
- Always wash your hands with clean water and soap after visiting washrooms.
- Avoid sharing utensil, drinking glasses and other personal items.
- Don't eat raw vegetables and fruits when on the go.
- Don't take iced drinks or adding ice to your drinks.
- Use bottled water to brush your teeth or rinse your mouth.
- Avoid taking your meals in an unhygienic setting.
- Go for a hepatitis vaccine if you are planning to travel

Hepatitis is a dangerous disease that millions live with every day. It is moderately contagious but easily preventable. Now medicine is almost curing hepatitis C and soon in the future all the hepatitis virus will be 100% treatable.

Article Submitted By: Guy T. Easterling, DO, FACP  
Chief Medical Officer  
Taylor Health Care Group