

Hepatitis C can have a major impact on many parts of your life. Many people are surprised to learn that they have been diagnosed with hepatitis C. Some people feel overwhelmed by the changes that they will need to make in their lives. Having hepatitis C can also make you feel very tired and drained emotionally. In addition, some hepatitis C medicines can make you feel more anxious, irritable, or sad. There are many things you can do to deal with the emotional aspects of having hepatitis C. Some of the most common feelings associated with a diagnosis of hepatitis C are listed below, as well as some suggestions on how to cope with these feelings:

■ Sadness or depression

It is normal to feel sad when you learn you have hepatitis C. Some people also feel guilty about getting the virus. Symptoms of depression may include the following:

- Feeling sad, anxious, irritable, or hopeless
- Gaining or losing weight
- Sleeping more or less than usual
- Moving slower than usual or finding it is hard to sit still
- Losing interest in the things you usually enjoy
- Feeling tired all the time
- Feeling worthless or guilty
- Having a hard time concentrating
- Thinking about death or giving up



Many people have these feelings at times. But if you find that these feelings don't go away or are getting worse, talk with your doctor or someone else you trust. You may also want to

- get involved with a support group
- spend time with supportive people
- talk with your doctor about medicines for depression

■ Anger

Anger is another common feeling. Many people are upset about how they got the virus or angry that they didn't know that they had the virus. Suggestions on how to deal with feelings of anger include the following:

- Talk about your feelings with others (such as in a support group or with a counselor or social worker).
- Try to get some exercise (such as gardening, walking, or dancing) to relieve some of the tension.
- Avoid situations or triggers (people, places, and events) that cause you to feel angry or stressed.

■ Fear and anxiety

Fear and anxiety may be caused by not knowing what to expect or how others will treat you once they know you have hepatitis C. Fear can make your heart beat faster or make it hard for you to sleep. Anxiety can also make you feel nervous or agitated. Fear and anxiety might make you sweat, feel dizzy, or feel short of breath. Some ways to control your feelings of fear and anxiety include the following:

- Learn as much about hepatitis C as you can and getting your questions answered by a health care provider.
- Talk with your friends, family members, health care providers, or joining a support group.
- Help others in the same situation, which may empower you and lessen your feelings of isolation and fear.
- Talk to your doctor about medicines for anxiety if the feelings don't lessen with time or if they get worse.

Who can I contact for more information?

Call your local VA medical center and visit the Veterans Affairs Hepatitis C Web site at <http://www.hepatitis.va.gov/>

Contact the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Hepatitis Toll-Free Information Line at 1-888-4 HEPACDC (1-888-443-7232) and visit the Web site at <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/diseases/hepatitis>

■ Taking care of yourself

There are many ways to help take care of your emotional needs. Here are just a few ideas:

- Talk about your feelings with your doctor, friends, family members, or other supportive people.
- Try to find activities that relieve your stress, such as exercise or hobbies you enjoy.
- Try to get enough sleep each night to help you feel rested.
- Learn relaxation methods like meditation, yoga, or deep breathing.
- Limit the amount of caffeine and nicotine you use.
- Eat small, healthy meals throughout the day.
- Join a support group.

There are many different kinds of support groups that provide a place where you can talk about your feelings, help others, and get the latest new information about hepatitis C. Check with your VA health care provider for a listing of local support groups. Some VA medical centers have support groups available at the clinic or hospital.



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