

Nutritional Guidelines for Chronic Hepatitis

What is chronic hepatitis?

Chronic hepatitis is an inflammation of the liver that causes ongoing injury to liver cells. It is commonly caused by the Hepatitis B or C viruses. Fatigue (feeling tired) is the most common symptom of chronic hepatitis. Many people also experience loss of appetite, nausea (feeling sick to your stomach), abdominal discomfort, and diarrhea.

Do you need a special diet?

There is no evidence that a specific type of diet is needed for chronic hepatitis; however, good nutrition can help the damaged liver to heal.

Eat a diet that is rich in nutrients to give yourself the best chance to stay healthy. Your body needs protein, carbohydrate, and fat, along with vitamins and minerals, every day, for your body to function well and repair damaged tissues.

Sometimes the symptoms of hepatitis make it difficult to eat a nutritious diet. The following nutrition guidelines are for persons with **mild symptoms** of hepatitis. *If your symptoms get worse, see your doctor.*

How much protein do you need?

Proteins are the building blocks for all your cells and tissues including your liver. You need to eat some foods high in protein at each meal, every day, to help your liver to heal. Protein needs can vary depending on the stage of liver disease. A dietitian can help you figure out how much protein you need. For more information call Dial-A-Dietitian.

In general you should:

- ✓ Eat 2-3 servings of meat or meat alternatives every day. These foods include meat, poultry, fish, eggs, dried beans, tofu, nuts, and seeds.

- ✓ Eat 2-4 servings of milk products every day. These foods include milk, yogurt, and cheese. *If you do not eat milk products, consult a dietitian, or call Dial-A-Dietitian for information about other food choices.*

What about calories?

All foods contain calories. Calories provide fuel for your body to function. Your body (including organs such as the brain, liver, and heart) needs a steady supply of fuel. You need to get enough calories each day so the protein can be used to repair tissues. Otherwise the protein you eat will be broken down to provide fuel and will not be available for tissue repair. If you are losing weight it usually means that you are not getting enough calories. Try to eat enough food to maintain a healthy weight.

Suggestions to help you eat enough calories:

- ✓ Eat 5 to 6 times a day. Try not to go more than 2 to 3 hours without eating. If you have lost your appetite, try to eat small amounts regularly, even if you are not hungry.
- ✓ Eat 5-12 servings from the grain product food group (breads, cereal, rice, pasta). Be sure to have some of these foods with each meal and snack.
- ✓ Eat 5-10 servings from the vegetable and fruit group.
- ✓ If you are too tired to make meals, keep plenty of nutritious snack foods and easy-to-prepare foods on hand like bread, bagels, muffins, fruits, vegetables, yogurt and pudding.

If you are having problems with eating, ask your doctor for a referral to see a dietitian, or call Dial-A-Dietitian at 604-732-9191 or 1-800-667-3438

Should you eat fat?

Sometimes you may not be able to digest fat very well. You may feel nauseous or have diarrhea after eating fatty foods. If this is the case, limit your fat intake by choosing lower-fat foods. Remember that fat is a valuable source of calories, so try to eat at least a little fat each day, especially if you need to gain weight. If fat is a problem:

- ✓ Eat lower-fat protein choices like low-fat or skim milk, low-fat yogurt or cottage cheese, lean meats, chicken, fish, tofu or beans.
- ✓ Avoid fried or greasy foods and limit margarine, butter and oils to no more than 6 teaspoons a day.
- ✓ Eat more breads, cereals, rice, pasta, fruits and vegetables as these foods are lower in fat.

What about vitamin and mineral supplements?

Individuals with hepatitis may not absorb or use nutrients properly. If you are not eating well or have vomiting or diarrhea, you are more likely to need a vitamin/mineral supplement; however, if your liver is not working well, there is an increased risk of toxic reactions if you take high doses of some vitamins and minerals.

Check with your doctor before you take any type of supplement or herbal product. Your doctor may suggest you take a general multivitamin-mineral supplement. *It is important to avoid taking very high doses of any vitamin or mineral, especially iron or Vitamin A, unless prescribed by your doctor.*

Is it okay to drink alcohol?

Alcohol can damage your liver, increasing the problems already caused by hepatitis. To be safe, it is best not to drink alcohol at all. See also Health File 40b: Living Well with Hepatitis C.

What about physical activity?

Moderate physical activity may improve appetite, decrease stress and help with symptoms of depression. If you have been inactive for a long time increase your activity slowly. Remember to check with your doctor before starting an exercise program. *See Canada's Physical Activity Guide to Healthy Active Living*

For further information, contact:

**Dial-a-Dietitian at 604-732-9191
Or 1-800-667-3438**

Or your community nutritionist

Resource List

Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating
Web site: www.hc-sc.gc.ca
Also available at your local health unit.

Canada's Physical Activity Guide to Healthy Active Living
Telephone number: 1-888-334-9769
Web site: www.paguide.com

Canadian Liver Foundation
Telephone number: 1-800-563-5483
Web site: www.liver.ca/english/index.html