

# Internally Yours®

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## Hepatitis

Hepatitis is not a specific disease, but rather a condition where there is inflammation of the liver. The liver is inflamed as a result of injury which may be caused by infection, chemical, autoimmune, metabolic or hereditary factors.

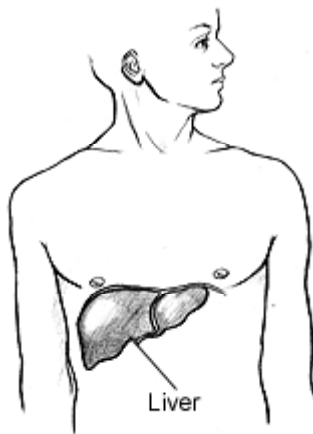
Symptoms of hepatitis may include fatigue, loss of appetite, loss of sensation of taste, nausea, vomiting, low grade fever, diarrhea, abdominal pain, and jaundice.

**Infectious hepatitis** is usually caused by one of the hepatitis viruses, named A through E. Less commonly, viral hepatitis may be caused by mononucleosis, cytomegalovirus, herpes or rubella.

**Hepatitis A.** Before the hepatitis A virus was identified, hepatitis A was called “infectious hepatitis.” It is the most common form of viral hepatitis, and may occur in epidemics. Hepatitis A is transmitted through water that has been contaminated by the feces of infected individuals. It is acquired by ingesting infected food or water. The illness may be so mild that infected individuals feel that they only have a “cold” or “the flu”, and many have no symptoms at all. The illness generally resolves on its own over several weeks, does not become chronic, and is rarely fatal. A vaccine is available to prevent hepatitis A.

**Hepatitis B** is transmitted by contact with infected blood, and used to be called “serum hepatitis” (to distinguish it from hepatitis A, which used to be called

“infectious hepatitis”) before it was discovered that hepatitis B is also caused by an infectious agent. Hepatitis B is acquired through contact with body fluids of an infected person, for example, through blood contact, sexual intercourse, sharing needles, transfusion with infected blood or at the time of birth. Hepatitis B attacks may be mild or severe. Hepatitis B usually resolves, but



some cases do not, resulting in a chronic infection and a chronic carrier state. Chronic hepatitis B may lead to severe liver damage (cirrhosis) or liver cancer. Alcohol use should be avoided. Some cases of chronic hepatitis B will respond to treatment with medication. A vaccine is available to prevent hepatitis B.

**Hepatitis C** is also transmitted through contact with infected blood. Sexual transmission can occur, but is less common than with hepatitis B. Multiple sex partners, contact with prostitutes and male homosexual activity

appear to increase the risk of transmission. Hepatitis C has a high rate of becoming chronic. Hepatitis C is often asymptomatic in the acute stage, and many cases are diagnosed when already chronic. Chronic hepatitis C may lead to cirrhosis and increases the risk of liver cancer. Hepatitis C is one of the most common causes of liver failure and the need for liver transplant. Some cases of chronic hepatitis C respond to the medication. There is no vaccine to prevent hepatitis C.

**Hepatitis D** is a rare infection, transmitted by blood, that only occurs in individuals already infected with the hepatitis B virus.

**Hepatitis E** causes an illness similar to hepatitis A. Hepatitis E is uncommon in the U.S.

**Chemical hepatitis** is most often caused by excessive alcohol use, and less often by medications or toxins.

In **autoimmune hepatitis** the body makes antibodies against its own tissue, similar to the situation in conditions such as rheumatoid arthritis and lupus.

A **metabolic** form of hepatitis has been identified, called NASH (nonalcoholic steatohepatitis) or NAFLD (nonalcoholic fatty liver disease). Once thought to be benign, it is now recognized that NAFLD can lead to cirrhosis. NAFLD is associated with obesity, diabetes mellitus, hypertension and high levels of blood fats (triglycerides). There is no available treatment other than weight loss.