

Hepatitis C Treatment

New treatments to cure hepatitis C:

Introduction

Since 2016, new medications to cure hepatitis C have been on the pharmaceutical benefits scheme (PBS), making them accessible and affordable. These medications are called direct acting antiviral drugs (DAA's).

Types of medication

There are lots of different medications and your doctor will prescribe the best one for you. This depends on many factors including the genotype you have and if you have any damage to your liver.

Some common medications are called:

- Harvoni®
- Epclusa®
- Solvadi®

For most people the treatment consists of one or two tablets a day for 12 weeks and no injections.

Length of treatment

For the majority of people the treatment will go for 12 weeks. Sometimes it can be up to 24 weeks. New medications such as Maviret® only need to be taken for 8 weeks.

What about the old treatments?

Treatment with injections, ribavirin or interferon is now extremely rare. Ribavirin is most likely to be needed if there is evidence of severe cirrhosis or previous treatment has failed.

There are now 'pan-genotypic' medications, including Epclusa® and Maviret® which can treat all genotypes.

Side effects of new treatments?

The large majority of people tolerate the new treatments with only very minor side effects if any.

What will I need to do?

Before you begin treatment you will need a blood test to:

- Assess your general health.
- Confirm your hepatitis C diagnosis.
- Check the status of your liver function
- Find out the genotype and amount of virus in your blood.

Depending on the results of these blood tests you may need a Fibroscan®. This is similar to an ultrasound and is painless and quick. It assess the amount of scarring on your liver.

You will likely be recommended to get a blood test after you have been taking the treatment for 4 weeks. This is to monitor how your body is responding to the medications and that your body is tolerating it.

In most cases, you should be able to be prescribed the treatment by GP's in the community. However not all GP's will prescribe it. If you have evidence of liver scarring or certain co-morbidities then you may be referred to a specialist. You will still be able to access the treatment.

Success Rates

The new treatments will successfully cure 90-95% of people. To be 'cured' means that hepatitis C RNA is not detected on a blood test 12 weeks after completing treatment. This is called a sustained virological load (SVR).

There is medication for all genotypes called Vosevi® which is specifically designed for treatment in people who were not successful with first line DAA treatment.

What will I need to avoid?

There are some drug to drug interactions, which means there are some other medications you should not take at the same time as your hepatitis C treatment. It is important to tell your doctor about any prescribed, over the counter or herbal/natural medicines you are taking. These are usually able to be managed or changed and it does not mean you cannot access the treatment.

You must avoid pregnancy if either the potential mother or father are on hepatitis C treatment and often for a few months afterwards. Your doctor will talk to you about appropriate forms of contraception.

Can I access it?

The new treatments are available for anyone over 18 with a Medicare card. There are no other restrictions. You do not need to stop taking drugs to be allowed to access the treatment. The cost of the treatment is usually just the cost of the script, which is on the PBS.

If you are in prison you are also able to access the treatment and should be encouraged to do so.

Some pharmacies may take a couple of days to order in the medications after they received your script. It is important to plan ahead so you don't run out.

This info sheet is intended as a general guide only. It is not intended to replace expert or medical advice.

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