

Coping with Hepatitis C: Alternative Treatments

More people are turning to alternative treatments for help with their health problems. In most cases, there is not enough research to tell if these treatments really help people with hepatitis C. Some alternative medicines can be very dangerous for people who have liver disease. If you want to try alternative medicines to help you cope with your infection, please follow these guidelines:



- **Always check with your doctor**

Your VA doctor can tell you how much is known about an alternative treatment. Your doctor can also tell you if an alternative treatment is safe.

- **See an expert**

It is a mistake to use any treatment, even an alternative treatment, without expert advice. Talk to people who have seen the alternative treatment expert in the past to be sure the person has a good reputation. Ask about his or her education, licenses, and certificates.

- **Beware of false promises**

Avoid alternative treatments that promise to cure your hepatitis C. Also, avoid any alternative medicine that is not available in the United States or that costs a lot of money.

Certain herbs, supplements, and “mega” vitamins can be very dangerous for people with hepatitis C. Your liver plays an important role in breaking down these medicines after you take them into your body. If your liver is sick, many herbs, supplements, and “mega” vitamins can hurt it even more. Be sure to ask your health care provider before taking any herbs, supplements, or “mega” vitamins. Just because a medicine says it is “natural” does not mean it is safe.

While the above warnings apply in every case, here are some ways people with hepatitis C use alternative treatments to help them cope with their hepatitis C infection. Talk with your doctor if you would like more information about any of these alternatives:

- **Aromatherapy**

Aromatherapy is based on the idea that certain smells can change the way you feel. People use aromatherapy to reduce stress or to help with fatigue or tiredness. Aromatherapy might help you cope with side effects of your hepatitis C treatment. The “essential oils” used in aromatherapy are very strong. They can be harmful. Always talk with an expert before buying or using these oils yourself.

IMPORTANT WARNING: USE HERBAL REMEDIES, SUPPLEMENTS, VITAMINS, AND OTHER “NATURAL” MEDICINE CAREFULLY.

- **Massage therapy**

There are many different types of massage. Massage helps people relax and can also help reduce muscle pain, back pain, headaches, and soreness. Massage therapists are licensed in many states. Ask your doctor to recommend someone if you want to try massage therapy.

- **Meditation and visualization**

Meditation and visualization are common tools people use to cope with pain and stress. Some people say that meditation helps them cope with the side effects of their hepatitis C treatment. If you are interested in meditation, there are many books and tapes that can help. You may also be able to take a meditation class for free or at a reduced cost. Ask your doctor for more information.

- **Yoga**

Yoga is an ancient set of exercises that is often combined with meditation. Yoga helps many people improve their fitness, reduce stress, and increase their flexibility. Some kinds of yoga are gentle enough for people with hepatitis C and other illnesses. Talk with your doctor if you are interested in yoga. Also, be sure to tell your yoga teacher that you have a liver disease. While most yoga is safe, some exercises may be dangerous if your liver is swollen.

Ask your VA doctor for more information about these or other alternative treatments to help you cope with your hepatitis C infection.

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 HEP CDC (1-888-443-7232)** and visit the Web site at:

<http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/diseases/hepatitis>

This material is not copyrighted and may be reproduced.

Patient Care Services Veterans Health Administration

Department of Veterans Affairs, 810 Vermont Avenue, NW Washington, DC 20420

IB 10-653

February 2016