

Hepatitis

Hepatitis is a broad category of inflammatory conditions that afflict the liver. It is one of the most common health problems in the US, with viral hepatitis being a leading cause for liver cancer and liver transplants.

What is Hepatitis?

The word “hepatitis” means inflammation of the liver. Hepatitis is most often caused by a virus, the most common in the US

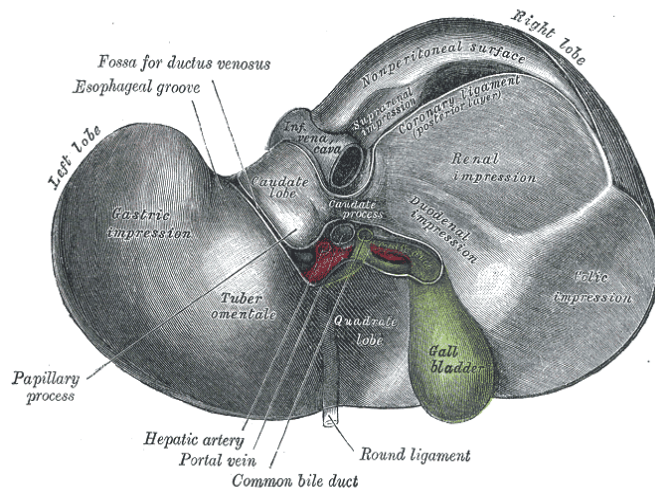
being Hepatitis A, Hepatitis B, and Hepatitis C. It’s estimated that nearly 4.4 million Americans have serious occurrences of hepatitis, with 80,000 new cases annually.

Common Causes

Aside from viral infections, hepatitis can occur from autoimmune diseases (in which the immune system attacks itself), too much alcohol intake, various toxins such as poison mushrooms, genetics, and a range of bacterial and parasitic organisms.

Signs and Symptoms

Hepatitis can either be acute, in which it starts and ends quickly, or chronic, which leads to long-term disease and more damage, including liver failure or liver cancer. Severity depends on many factors, including the cause of the liver damage and any other illnesses you have. Symptoms vary based on the cause, but the general signs include abdominal pain, breast development in males, dark urine and pale or clay-colored stools, fatigue, fever, general itching, jaundice (yellowing of the skin or eyes), loss of



appetite, nausea and vomiting, and weight loss. Note that many people with hepatitis B or C do not have symptoms initially.

Risk Factors

Aside from drinking too much alcohol, risk factors for the condition vary for each type of virus. Hepatitis A, the least serious and least common, spreads through the consumption of fecal matter (even in microscopic amounts), from close contact with an infected area or person, or from the ingestion of contaminated food or drinks.

Hepatitis B, which ranges from being acute to being chronic enough to cause liver disease or liver cancer, spreads through contact with infected body fluids, having sex with an infected person, sharing contaminated needles to inject drugs, or from an infected mother to her newborn.

Hepatitis C can sometimes be acute, but most often becomes a chronic condition that can lead to cirrhosis of the liver and liver cancer. Contact

with the blood of an infected person, primarily through sharing contaminated needles to inject drugs, is the most common cause.

Hepatitis A and B both have vaccines available, while Hepatitis C does not. However, by practicing good hygiene, avoiding the

injection of drugs, and limiting your alcohol intake, you can reduce your chances of developing hepatitis and improve your health in general.

Learn more at: <http://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/PublicInfo.htm#whatIsHep>

HIGHLIGHTS

Though prevention is the best and most effective course of action, treatment for hepatitis is available. All treatments should include monitoring by a health professional.

Hepatitis A is usually addressed through resting, drinking more fluids, and avoiding things like alcohol, fatty foods, and drugs such as tylenol.

Hepatitis B, if acute, can be dealt with the same way as hepatitis A. Chronic cases require special medications and in the most severe cases a liver transplant.

For hepatitis C, several special medications are used, often in combination with each other, for about 24 to 48 weeks.

For more health topics, visit www.dadehealth.org/atoz/atoz.asp