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Best and Worst Foods and Drinks for Hepatitis C

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What you eat and drink can impact your body’s experience with the hepatitis C virus. Healthy eating habits can support your liver and your body’s ability to limit liver damage. On the flip side, poor food choices can affect the rate of hepatitis C progression, heightening the risk for and worsening some complications of the disease. Though there are many food and drink choices you can make that can help or hinder your body’s response to hepatitis C, there are standouts in both groups. Check with your doctor about specific dietary recommendations because other concerns -- such as obesity, high blood pressure, diabetes and your liver health -- may influence dietary recommendations for you.

Avoid All Alcohol

Avoiding alcohol is one of the most important things you can do for your health with hepatitis C. The authors of a study published in "Alimentary Pharmacology and Therapeutics" in April 2003 reported that even low alcohol intake can increase liver scarring from hepatitis C, which may eventually lead to cirrhosis and liver failure. The effects of this risk were confirmed in a February 2013 research report in the same journal. Researchers found that people with hepatitis C who consume even low to moderate amounts of alcohol are more likely to die of liver-related and other causes, compared to those who abstain.

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The American Association for the Study of Liver Disease and the Infectious Diseases Society of America hepatitis C treatment guidelines recommend complete abstinence from alcohol for anyone with the disease.

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Avoid Trans Fats

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration announced in June 2015 that trans fat is not a safe food additive and will be eliminated from processed foods by mid-2018. Trans fats -- also known as partially hydrogenated oils or PHOs -- disrupt fat and sugar metabolis and are especially unhealthy for people with hepatitis C. They contribute to damaging fat accumulation in the liver and increase liver inflammation, which might accelerate hepatitis C disease progression.

Trans fats are most often found in processed foods, such as baked goods, fast food, frozen pizza, snack foods, stick margarine, ready-to-use frosting and coffee creamer. Although the FDA requires trans fat content be included on nutrition labels, it does not have to be listed if a product contains less than 0.5 gram of trans fat per serving -- so check the ingredients. Any food that lists partially hydrogenated oil as an ingredient contains trans fat.

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Avoid High-Sugar Foods

Hepatitis C disrupts normal sugar metabolism, causing a condition called insulin resistance in many people with the illness. With insulin resistance, the body produces the blood-sugar-lowering hormone insulin but can't use it effectively. As a result, blood sugar builds up instead of being absorbed by body tissues. Insulin resistance often leads to type 2 diabetes, both of which can increase hepatitis C severity by promoting liver inflammation and scarring.

High levels of dietary sugar increase the risk for type 2 diabetes, note the authors of a February 2014 "BMC Public Health" global study report. So avoiding foods with high sugar content, including sugar-sweetened beverages, desserts and candy, is important for people with hepatitis C. Foods containing large amounts of starch also contribute to the body's sugar load because starch is quickly broken down into sugar by the digestive system. Examples of high-starch foods to avoid include white rice, pasta, potatoes and white bread.

Increase Fruits and Vegetables

Though oxygen is vital for life, it can generate potentially damaging chemicals called free radicals when interacting with other body substances. The battle between the hepatitis C virus and immune system generates excessive free radicals, which intensify liver damage and may contribute to liver cancer development. Antioxidants -- nutrients found primarily in fresh fruits and vegetables -- help protect the liver from free radical damage by neutralizing these chemicals. The authors of a November 2013 "International



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Journal of Cancer" research report found that antioxidants from fruits and vegetable might also help prevent liver cancer, a life-threatening possibility for people with hepatitis C.

The "Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2010" recommends 1.5 to 2 cups of fruit and 2 to 3 cups of vegetables daily. Berries and citrus are among the best fruit choices because of their high antioxidant content. Cruciferous vegetables -- such as broccoli, brussels sprouts, cabbage, collard greens and kale -- are good vegetable choices. They're rich in antioxidants like vitamin C, beta-carotene and lutein, and contain substances called glucosinolates that might protect against cancer.

Eat Low-Fat Protein

The body uses dietary protein to make new proteins it needs. Adequate protein in the diet is important for people with hepatitis C to ensure healthy immune system function and enable the body to generate new liver cells to replace those killed by the virus. Low-fat protein from vegetables and lean animal meats are best because people with hepatitis C often accumulate excess fat in the liver, which can worsen the disease. Avoiding saturated fats from fatty animal meats helps limit this risk.

The "Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2010" recommends approximately 5 ounces of protein daily for women and 6 ounces for men. At least 8 ounces of seafood is recommended weekly. Some of the best food choices for high-quality protein include:

- Beans, peas and nuts.
- Egg whites, and nonfat yogurt and milk.
- Fish and skinless chicken or turkey.
- Lean cuts of beef and pork.

Drink Coffee or Green Tea

Coffee is a good beverage choice for people with hepatitis C. A large study, known as HALT-C, followed people with advanced hepatitis C and found that those who drank 3 or more cups of coffee daily had a 53 percent lower risk of liver disease progression, compared to people who didn't drink coffee. In a November 2009 "Hepatology" HALT-C study report, the researchers speculated that the benefits of coffee might be due to an associated decrease in insulin resistance and reduced liver inflammation.

Green tea might also benefit people with hepatitis C. Substances in the tea called catechins have antiinflammatory and antioxidant properties, which might combat some of the harmful effects of hepatitis C on the liver. However, the HALT-C study did not find that drinking green tea slowed hepatitis C disease progression.

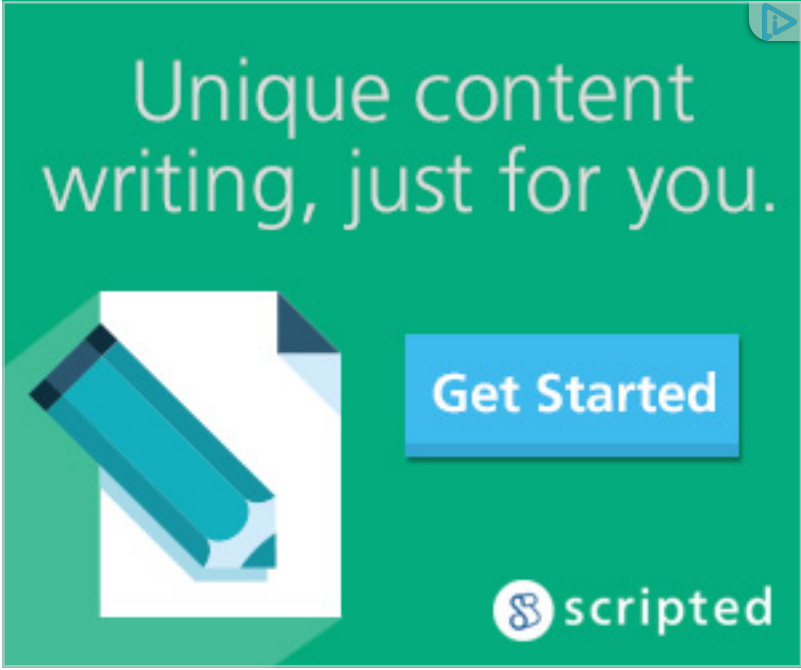
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