

The relationship you have with your health team can make a big difference to your experience of managing your hepatitis C. Having a good relationship with your health care team can help you feel more confident about what is happening to you.

A good relationship with your health care team is a two-way street. You can help maintain your end of the relationship by telling your GP, specialist or health care worker about any past or current health-related problems, any changes in your health as well as what medications you are taking. You should also make sure you understand the information you are being told and ask for additional information if you require it.

Whilst you will have different expectations of different members of your health care team it is reasonable to expect that they will show you respect and answer your queries about your health. You can expect your doctor and/or specialist to: support your long-term health care needs; monitor your health on a regular basis; recognise when there is a need for further investigations; and, recognise your need for other forms of support, such as counselling.

Choosing your doctor

It is important to have a GP or specialist you have confidence in and trust. You need a GP/specialist who listens to you, who you can talk to, and who is respectful and concerned for you as an individual.

In general, it is your right to choose a doctor with whom you feel comfortable and in whom you have confidence.

You should feel at ease with your doctor. You will want to ask questions of your doctor and make your concerns known to them. Your doctor will be responsible for taking the time to answer your questions and listen to your concerns. If you and your doctor feel the same way about sharing information, and making choices, you probably have a good relationship.

Everyone has a different style of sharing information. The perfect doctor for one person may not be a good match for another. If choosing a new doctor think about what you value in a doctor and what you want as a patient. Look for a doctor who can meet your needs. You may wish to ask friends, family or others about doctor's they have attended with the qualities you value. You may also want to ask a new doctor about their experience treating people with hepatitis C.

To see a medical specialist you will need a referral from your current doctor. A doctor that understands your requirements will be better suited in referring you to a specialist who can meet your needs.

Some people with hepatitis C will also visit a complementary or alternative therapy practitioner as part of their health care. For information on choosing a natural health practitioner download the **Complementary and Alternative Therapies factsheet** on this website.

Maintaining good communication with your health care team

There are things you can do to help ensure that you maintain good communication with your health care team:

- tell your doctor, specialist or health practitioner about any changes in body functions or health care;
- if you need more details or information let your doctor or health worker know. If you feel your questions aren't being addressed, try asking them another way;
- unless you tell your doctor or health worker that you don't understand something they will usually assume that you do;

- clarify the information you are given. Make sure you understand the information you are given. Sometimes, without realising it, doctors use terms their patients don't understand. If you don't understand something, ask your doctor to explain it to you;
- if you have concerns about your health care, raise these with your doctor or health worker; and
- ask your healthcare worker where you can get more information about hepatitis C and what to do if you have any questions for your doctor or specialist between appointments.

Don't be afraid to tell your GP, specialist or healthcare worker how much or how little information you want. If you would like more information than you are getting, let your doctor or health worker know what you would like to know. If you don't want as much medical detail as your doctor or health worker provides, make sure you tell them that you would prefer to be given basic information in plain English.

If you have a problem talking with your GP, specialist or healthcare worker there are often ways to improve the situation. Try working out your concerns with the practitioner. State your concern to your practitioner as honestly and openly as possible. If the situation does not improve you may consider talking with a third party about the problem. Another health worker or doctor might be willing to discuss the matter with the practitioner. Sometimes this is less stressful than facing the doctor directly, and their help could improve the situation. If the situation does not improve, it may be time to find a new doctor.

Making the most of your appointments

Sometimes your meetings with your GP, specialist or healthcare worker can seem rushed or may leave you feeling unsatisfied. There are things you can do to help ensure you get what you need out of each appointment.

It is important to be prepared. If you have not seen this health practitioner before take the time before your appointment to write down all of your medications, a brief medical history, and your chief health complaints. Even if you see your GP, specialist or healthcare worker on a regular basis take the time before your appointment to think through any changes in your health since your last visit that you should highlight. Think through or write down questions that you need to ask at the visit.

Often a lot of different points are discussed in one meeting with your doctor or specialist. It can be difficult to remember all the things that are discussed, particularly if you are feeling overwhelmed, anxious or afraid. There are several ways to make sure you remember everything your doctor tells you. Consider:

- taking notes to help you recall what is said. You may want to do this during your appointment or immediately after;
- ask if you can tape record your talk to listen to after if necessary; and
- take someone you trust with you. They can remind you of questions you want to ask and help you remember later what the practitioner said.

Be sure you are clear on any instructions that the practitioner has given you. It can help to clarify any instructions you have been given or suggestions your practitioner has made at the end of the appointment.

Useful questions to ask your doctor or specialist

Even if your GP, specialist or health care worker is thorough, asking questions can ensure you get the information you need about your health. Some common questions to help clarify your understanding of your health care that you may consider include:

- what course of action (such as treatment) do you recommend?;
- are there other alternatives?;
- what are the benefits of what is being recommended?; and
- what are the risks involved?

If you are considering treatment it is useful to clarify:

- what does the treatment do? What are its benefits?;
- what are the risks? Are there any side effects?;
- what can be done about the side effects?;
- what if I don't have treatment?;
- are there any other options?;
- how long do I have to decide?;
- how much will treatment cost me? What payment options are available?;
- will I still be able to work whilst having treatment?;
- do I need to tell anyone that I am having treatment?;
- where can I get support?; and
- what happens if the treatment isn't successful?

It is also useful to ask your doctor or specialist what the best time to call is if you have question or concerns between appointments. Some doctors have a special time to return calls. Expect your doctor to call you back, but remember that a quick response may not be possible.

For more information

For further information on hepatitis C please contact the national infoline 1300 HEP ABC (1300 437 222). The infoline diverts to information and support lines at your local state or territory hepatitis council.

Some of the information above has been abridged from various resources, these resources include:

Choosing a healthcare provider factsheet (HCV Advocate)—Download PDF from www.hcvadvocate.org/hepatitis/factsheets_pdf/choosing.pdf

Maximising your medical appointments fact sheet (HCV Advocate)—Download PDF from www.hcvadvocate.org/hepatitis/factsheets_pdf/max_appoint.pdf

Living with hep C: Tips for developing a good relationship with your doctor (Hepatitis Council of WA)—Download PDF from www.hepatitiswa.com.au/fact%20sheets.html