

Pre-fix

for people with Hep C or HIV who inject drugs



Canada's source for
HIV and hepatitis C
information

Pre-fix:

A guide for people living with Hep C or HIV who inject drugs

Second edition, 2013

Revised, 2015.

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Treatment Information Exchange).
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CATIE Ordering Centre No: ATI-70166
(Aussi disponible en français :
ATI-70167)

ISBN 978-1-927760-07-9



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CATIE would like to thank the following people for working with us to help produce this guide. Their time and knowledge were invaluable and much appreciated.

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CATIE also thanks the community consultation participants from the Atlantic Community Facilitator Training Group, CACTUS, the CATIE Harm Reduction Resource Advisory Group, the Sherbourne Health Centre and especially the people living with Hep C or HIV who contributed their stories, wisdom and advice to this guide. Special thanks to Michael Bailey, Carine Bricaud, Zoe Dodd, Thomas Egdorf, Amy Muli and Jeff Rice for their assistance organizing the community consultation process.

CATIE gratefully acknowledges that information about the down kit and how sex workers can take care of themselves while working and using drugs was adapted from Stella's *Dope Guide*.

About CATIE

CATIE is Canada's source for up-to-date, unbiased information about HIV and hepatitis C. We connect people living with HIV or hepatitis C, at-risk communities, healthcare providers and community organizations with the knowledge, resources and expertise to reduce transmission and improve quality of life.

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Disclaimer

Decisions about particular medical treatments should always be made in consultation with a qualified medical practitioner knowledgeable about HIV- and hepatitis C-related illness and the treatments in question.

CATIE provides information resources to help people living with HIV and/or hepatitis C who wish to manage their own health care in partnership with their care providers. Information accessed through or published or provided by CATIE, however, is not to be considered medical advice. We do not recommend or advocate particular treatments and we urge users to consult as broad a range of sources as possible. We strongly urge users to consult with a qualified medical practitioner prior to undertaking any decision, use or action of a medical nature.

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Information on safer drug use is presented as a public health service to help people make healthier choices to reduce the spread of HIV, viral hepatitis and other infections. It is not intended to encourage or promote the use or possession of illegal drugs.

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Pre-fix, What Works and Treat Me Right

Pre-fix is one of three CATIE resources on living with Hep C or HIV for people who inject drugs. It is a comprehensive guide to taking care of one's health, intended for frontline workers and for people living with Hep C or HIV who inject drugs.

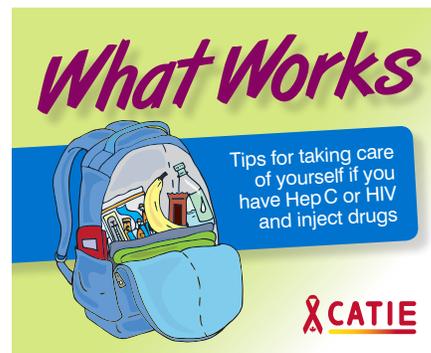
The two companion pieces are pocket-sized, easy-to-read booklets. They are intended for people living with Hep C or HIV who inject drugs who want accessible information about how to take care of their health:

1. *What Works: Tips for taking care of yourself if you have Hep C or HIV and inject drugs* focuses on how to take care of your health. It includes information about how Hep C and HIV are passed from one person to another; tips for taking care of yourself when using drugs or having sex and other things you can do stay healthy. CATIE Ordering Centre No. ATI-70125
2. *Treat Me Right: Getting treated for Hep C or HIV if you inject drugs* provides basic information about Hep C and HIV treatment. CATIE Ordering Centre No. ATI-70125_B

These two resources can be ordered from the CATIE Ordering Centre at orders.catie.ca.

For frontline workers:

You may want to use *Pre-fix* to support your own learning, and *What Works* and *Treat Me Right* as part of your conversations with clients. The chart below shows where you'll find information on various topics.



Page in <i>Pre-fix</i>	Topic	Page in <i>What Works</i>	Page in <i>Treat Me Right</i>
5	If you're only going to read 2 things (the most important things to know)	Whole booklet	
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If you're only going to read two things

TOPICS:

Hep C and HIV: Why do they matter if you use injection drugs?

A quick look at living with Hep C or HIV

1. Hep C and HIV: Why do they matter if you use injection drugs?

Hep C (hepatitis C) and HIV are viruses that can make you very sick. Both Hep C and HIV are passed from one person to another through the blood, which can happen when people share needles and other injection equipment to use drugs. (HIV can also pass from one person to another during sex and from parent to child during pregnancy, birth and nursing. This is rare for Hep C.) In Canada, people who inject drugs are more at risk for these infections than people who don't inject drugs.

Hep C is a virus that attacks your liver. Your liver is an important part of your body that does many jobs, including filtering out things that are bad for you, changing the food you eat into energy for your body and fighting infections. You can't live without it.

Sometimes your body can get rid of Hep C on its own, but most often you need treatment to get rid of it. There is no vaccine for Hep C but there is a cure for it.

HIV (human immunodeficiency virus) attacks your body's defence against infections, making it easier for you to get sick. Your body's defence system is called the immune system. Without treatment, HIV can make it harder for your body to fight off illnesses and disease. Over time if you have HIV you can get sick with life-threatening infections. This is called AIDS (acquired immune deficiency syndrome).

There is no cure for HIV, but with the right treatment, care and support, most people with HIV can stay healthy and live a long time.

Some street drugs can also damage the liver and weaken the immune system, so if you're living with Hep C or HIV and using drugs, it is especially



important to take care of your health. The good news is there are lots of things you can do.

The only way to know for sure if you have Hep C or HIV is to get tested. It's a good idea to get tested for both Hep C and HIV regularly. If the result shows you don't have Hep C or HIV, it is still possible to get them in the future. If you have had Hep C before and cleared it, it is still possible you could get it again. There is a vaccine for hepatitis A and B but not for Hep C.

“When I read the paper I was given about the symptoms, I realized then that I had had some of the symptoms but I didn't know at the time I had them because I didn't know I had Hep C.” — Rob

2. A quick look at living with Hep C or HIV

There are many things you can do to take care of your health if you have Hep C or HIV and use injection drugs. Here is a short list to get you started:

- **Get tested**
Testing is the only way to know for sure if you have Hep C or HIV. You may not feel sick right now, but if you find out you have Hep C or HIV you can get connected with healthcare, learn about treatments, and find out how to protect yourself and others. The earlier you know, the better it is for your health.
- **Live as healthy as you can**
Try to eat healthy, get some rest and exercise. Surround yourself with

Some street drugs can damage the liver and weaken the immune system, so if you're living with Hep C or HIV and using drugs, it is important to take care of your health.

people who care about you. Living healthy can be hard if you don't have much money, a safe place to live, or access to clean drinking water. Do the best you can. Every bit helps.

- **Get connected to healthcare**
Doctors, nurses, peer workers, harm reduction workers and others can work with you to take care of your health. Sometimes people who use drugs get discriminated against when they try to get healthcare. There are things you can do to get the care you deserve.
- **Learn about treatments**
Monitoring tests will help you and your doctor make decisions about treatment. Both Hep C and HIV can be treated. Hep C can be cured and there are treatments for HIV that can keep you healthy for a long time. It is best to start treatment early, before you feel sick. It is possible to start treatment even if you are using drugs. To make treatment work, you need to be prepared to stay on it.
- **Protect yourself and others**
Knowing how Hep C and HIV pass from person to person means you can reduce the chance of getting yourself

or someone else infected. You might change the way you use drugs to make it safer for you and to lower the chance of passing on Hep C or HIV. You can do things to make sex safer too. You can take steps to have a safe pregnancy and a healthy baby. Finally, there are a few other infections you should know about.

Sometimes people who use injection drugs are told that they are not as good as other people and don't deserve to get the care they need. This is not true. All people deserve to be treated with respect and to get healthcare, including you.

These pages are full of information to help you make decisions about your health. Sometimes we suggest resources for more information. This guide is a print version of an online resource. It refers to other online resources. You can find these resources on the CATIE website at www.catie.ca. If you do not have access to the Internet, contact CATIE at 1-800-263-1638 to have a print copy mailed to you.

How do you know if you have Hep C or HIV?

How does someone get Hep C or HIV?

Both Hep C (hepatitis C) and HIV pass through blood-to-blood contact (when blood carrying the virus gets into another person's bloodstream). HIV can also be spread through semen (both cum and pre-cum), vaginal, front hole¹ or anal fluids and breast/chest² milk.

You **cannot** get Hep C or HIV from hugging, dry kissing, shaking hands or eating together.

Hep C can pass from someone who has Hep C to another person when sharing anything with blood on it, even if you can't see the blood. The blood with Hep C must get into the bloodstream of the uninfected person for Hep C to pass. Hep C virus can live outside the body for many days. Hep C often passes when sharing needles. This includes sharing equipment to inject or inhale drugs or re-using tattoo equipment. Hep C may also pass when sharing razors, nail clippers, toothbrushes or earrings. It is rare for Hep C to pass



TOPICS:

How does someone get Hep C or HIV?

Tests for Hep C and HIV

Confidential versus anonymous tests

Hep C and HIV testing in Canadian prisons

Bad veins and blood tests: things that help

Finding out you have Hep C or HIV: what do you do now?

Sharing your test result: to tell or not to tell

"Whoever tells you the news really needs to stress that your life is not over. If you're using or drinking, you may rebel and go out on a bit of a bender after finding out, and you shouldn't feel guilty or shameful about that. It's important to know that your life isn't over, but the reality is that there are some precautions you need to take now."

— Cindy

during sex, but it can, especially during rough, condomless anal sex.

HIV can pass through sharing needles and other drug use equipment, and it can pass when equipment is shared for tattooing or piercing. HIV may also pass during condomless sex and during pregnancy, birth or nursing.

Sharing pipes is a part of some spiritual ceremonies. There is no research about the risk of passing Hep C and HIV when sharing a ceremonial pipe, such as the Aboriginal tobacco pipe, but the risk is likely very low.

There are ways to stop Hep C and HIV from passing from one person to another. Learning about these can help you protect yourself and the people you care about.

Tests for Hep C and HIV

The only way to know for sure if you have Hep C or HIV is to get tested. It's a good idea to get tested for both Hep C and HIV if you haven't already. You can have Hep C or HIV and not feel sick for many years. By the time you do feel sick, the virus has already done a lot of damage to your body. The sooner you find out you have Hep C or HIV, the more you can do to stay healthy.

The tests for Hep C are different from the tests for HIV, so you need to be tested for both viruses. If you are told the test result is "positive," it means that you have Hep C or HIV.

If your test result shows you don't have Hep C or HIV, it is still possible to get them in the future. If you have had Hep C before and cleared it, it is possible you could get it again. Think about getting tested regularly, every six months to one year.

Hep C testing: how does it work?

You need two tests to know for sure if you have Hep C. Both are blood tests.

The first test checks for Hep C antibodies in your blood (**Hep C antibody test**). Antibodies are like flags that tell you if the Hep C virus has ever been in your body. If the first test finds Hep C antibodies, you need to get a second test to see if Hep C is still in your body, since some people can clear the Hep C virus without treatment. The second test is called the **RNA test** or **PCR** (polymerase chain reaction) **test**; it will tell you if you have the active virus. If this test is positive you have Hep C. Hep C testing is confidential. Anonymous Hep C testing is not available in Canada.

"I thought I had hepatitis C for 15 years. I never talked about it. I kept it hidden from my family and everything because I didn't want them to know. When I got tested and I found out [I was negative] it was shocking but I was also happy because I didn't have to go through the treatment." — Nancy

HIV testing: how does it work?

There are different kinds of HIV tests: standard blood tests, rapid blood tests and, in some places, oral swab tests. All tests check for HIV antibodies. Antibodies are like flags that tell you if HIV virus is in your body. A positive test result means that you have HIV. Your body cannot clear HIV on its own.

With standard testing, a blood sample is sent away to a lab and you should get the test result in about two weeks. With rapid blood testing and oral swab testing, the results of the test are available to you in minutes. HIV testing is available as confidential testing or anonymous testing, although anonymous testing is available only in some parts of Canada. You may want to talk about your options with someone you trust before deciding which type of test to do.

Confidential versus anonymous tests

Hep C and HIV are reportable infections. This means that a positive test result must be reported to the local public health

unit. This section describes the amount of privacy with different types of testing.

Confidential testing means that the test can be linked to you either through your name or a code. Your test result will only be seen by healthcare workers who need to know. They are not allowed to tell anyone else without your permission, except for the local public health unit. If the test result is positive, your name and the result will be reported to the public health unit in your region.

Public health workers may ask you for a list of people who may have been exposed to Hep C or HIV, such as people you have shared drug injection equipment with or your current or former sex partners. Public health staff may contact them and suggest they get tested for Hep C or HIV. They will not identify you or your status to the people they contact. Public health workers do this so they can help stop the spread of Hep C and HIV.

In smaller communities, where most people know each other, it may be difficult to get tested and not have people find out about your test result. If you can travel to a community where you know fewer people, you may want to get tested there.

Anonymous testing means that no name is put on the blood sample, clinic paper work or test results, so no one can identify you by looking at the test. A positive test result is reported to the local public health unit, but your identity is not reported. Anonymous HIV testing is available in some parts of Canada. Anonymous Hep C testing is not available in Canada.

Once a person with Hep C or HIV sees a doctor about their infection, it is recorded in their medical file that they have Hep C or HIV.

¹ The front hole is what is commonly referred to as the vagina. It is a term that is sometimes used by trans men who feel more comfortable with this language.

² Chest feeding refers to nursing an infant using one's chest. It is a term sometimes used by people on the trans masculine spectrum who feel more comfortable with this language.

Hep C and HIV testing in Canadian prisons

Voluntary Hep C and HIV testing is offered to all prisoners on admission to a federal jail and can be asked for by prisoners while in jail. Testing may be offered in some provincial prisons.

If you get tested for Hep C or HIV while you are in prison, your test results will be available to prison healthcare and possibly to the local public health unit. If you think you may have been exposed to Hep C or HIV, you may want to get tested.

- Drink two to three glasses of water a couple of hours before your test. This will make it easier to find a vein.
- If these things feel hard or scary to do, bring a friend, peer or harm reduction worker to the appointment with you.
- Try to save a vein for hospital emergencies or blood work.

If you take care of your veins, they can last a long time. To learn about how to inject in ways that keep your veins healthy, check out “Safer injection” on www.catie.ca.

- Try to meet some people who have Hep C or HIV who will talk about their experiences. You may be able to meet someone at a local community health organization.
- Find stories of people who have Hep C or HIV and how they managed. One source is *The Positive Side* at www.positiveside.ca.
- Learn whatever you can about Hep C or HIV and what you can do to stay healthy.
- Join a support group for people living with Hep C or HIV, if there is one in your area.
- If you have access to the Internet, you may want to check out online support groups.
- Try to remember that living with Hep C or HIV gets easier over time.
- If you are a spiritual or religious person, your beliefs and spiritual community may be a source of support and strength during this time.

It may be hard to believe at first, but lots of people live long and healthy lives with Hep C, HIV or both.

Getting treated for Hep C or HIV will help you stay healthy, especially if you have a long prison sentence.

If you want support or information before or after getting tested in prison, you can contact PASAN, an HIV and Hep C prisoner support organization. You can visit www.pasan.org or call collect 416-920-9567 or if you are in a federal institution you can call 1-866-224-9978. PASAN is on the Common Access list in federal prisons.

Bad veins and blood tests: things that help

Many of the tests for Hep C and HIV require blood to be taken. This can be hard if your veins are bad. There are some things you can do to make it easier to have your blood taken:

- Show the health worker which veins are good to draw blood from.
- If you feel comfortable, ask a health worker if there is a person on staff who is good at taking blood from damaged veins.
- Get your body warm. This can make it easier to take blood. Take a hot bath or shower before you go to get a blood test. Keep as warm as you can on your way to the appointment.

Finding out you have Hep C or HIV: what do you do now?

Finding out that you have Hep C or HIV can be hard. It's normal to feel scared, angry, sad or hopeless. You may also feel like you are numb for a little while. You may use more drugs than you normally do, or you may decide to cut back or stop.

It may be hard to believe at first, but lots of people live long and healthy lives with Hep C, HIV or both. There is treatment for Hep C that works for many people and medication for HIV that can keep you healthy for a long time.

“It gets better. That’s what people really need to know. When you first test positive, your whole life centres on it. That’s all you can think about, every minute of the day, all the time. But it gets better. I don’t think about my HIV on a daily or even weekly basis anymore.” — Cindy

The first few days or weeks after you find out you have Hep C or HIV can be the hardest. Here are a few things that other people have found helpful after they got their test result:

- Talk with a trusted friend, peer, counsellor or family member about how you feel. Try to find as many supportive people as possible.

Once you've found out you have Hep C or HIV, it's a good idea to visit a doctor or nurse regularly so they can work with you to take care of your health. Even if you don't feel sick from Hep C or HIV, the virus is attacking your body and causing damage. Treating the infection early will slow that damage and help you stay healthy. This may be hard if you've never had health problems before or if you've had bad experiences with doctors, other health workers or the healthcare system. Check out “Working with a doctor and other health workers” (page 15) in this guide for more info.

Sharing your test result: to tell or not to tell

If you find out you have Hep C or HIV you may decide that you want to tell some people. It's a good idea to tell your doctor or nurse so they can help you take care of your health. You may also want to tell a friend or family member so they can support you. In some cases you may want to keep the information private. For example, your landlord, parole officer or shelter staff worker does not need to know if you don't want them to know.

Privacy and your rights

Under Canadian law you have the right to decide when, how and who you tell your health information to. There are some exceptions to your right to keep your health information private. For example, health workers must share test results for some infectious diseases with public health. The information can also be shared if there is a risk of you harming someone else or if the information is needed for a legal investigation or court case. If you think your health information has been shared without your permission, you may be able to file a complaint.

Are there times when you have to tell people you have Hep C or HIV?

Yes, if you have HIV, you have a legal duty to tell people your HIV status before sex. It is not clear whether this legal duty applies to sharing drug injection equipment when you have HIV. It is also not clear whether people living with Hep C have the same legal duties.

If you have HIV and are having sex

In Canada, if you have HIV you have a legal duty to tell your sex partner(s) before having any kind of sex that poses a “realistic possibility of transmitting HIV.” People with HIV have been convicted of serious crimes for not telling their sex partners they have HIV. Based on the law:

- You **do** have a legal duty to disclose your HIV status:
 - o before having vaginal, frontal¹ or anal sex *without* a condom, regardless of your viral load; or
 - o before having vaginal, frontal or anal sex when your viral load is detectable (or not low), even if you use a condom.
- You **do not** have a duty to disclose before having vaginal sex if your viral load is low (or undetectable) *and* you use a condom. It is not clear whether

this also applies to anal sex or frontal sex.

- It is not clear how the law applies to oral sex (with or without a condom or a dental dam).

Telling the person you want to have sex with that you have HIV can be hard, but it often gets easier the more you do it. If someone doesn't want to have sex with you because you are HIV positive, that may be hard to hear, but they do have the choice. Just like you have the choice to say no to someone who wants to have sex with you.

“You just have to give people the opportunity to make up their mind about whether they want to have sex with you. If they don't, there are still other people who will. I'm at the point where my self-respect and self-esteem can handle that rejection. You start to see it as a reflection of the other person, not you.” — Cindy

If you have HIV and are sharing injection equipment

As far as we know, no Canadian court has yet decided whether an HIV-positive person who uses street drugs has a legal duty to tell their HIV status to someone with whom they are sharing drug-use equipment (for example, syringes, needles and crack pipes or stems). Sharing certain drug-use equipment (such as needles and syringes for injecting) is a high-risk activity for transmitting HIV. Therefore, it is safest to assume that police and courts would consider that sharing equipment poses a realistic possibility of HIV transmission, meaning a person would have a legal duty to tell his or her HIV-positive status before sharing.

If you have Hep C

Under Canadian criminal law, a person with a sexually transmitted infection has a legal duty to tell his or her partner about that infection before they have sex if the

sex will involve a significant risk of serious bodily harm. It is unclear whether people infected with the Hep C have a legal duty to disclose to their sex partners before sex.

The criminal law in Canada is also not clear about whether a person has a duty to disclose his or her Hep C infection when sharing drugs and drug equipment. As far as we know, there has not been a case where a person with Hep C has been criminally charged for exposing someone to the virus by sharing drugs or drug equipment.

Discrimination and your rights

Discrimination is being treated unfairly simply because of who you are. As a person who uses drugs and has Hep C or HIV or both, you may experience discrimination because of some or all of these things. Some other reasons you may be discriminated against include ethnic origin, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, age or disability. Laws have been put in place to prevent people from being treated unfairly. If you want to file a complaint about discrimination you've experienced in most cases you can usually do that with your provincial or territorial human rights commission.

Check out Chapter 21, *Legal issues*, in the online guide *Managing your health* for information on privacy, discrimination and HIV transmission and the law. The guide is available online at www.catie.ca.

For more Hep C legal information, check out online, “When is a person legally required to tell other people about his or her hepatitis C infection?” at www.catie.ca.

¹ Frontal sex is what is commonly referred to as vaginal sex. It is a term sometimes used by trans men who feel more comfortable with this language.

Living as healthy as you can with Hep C or HIV

Get connected, get care

There are different reasons you might want to connect with other people or services. Emotional support, practical help and spiritual support from friends, family, counsellors and spiritual leaders such as Elders and ministers can make living with Hep C (hepatitis C) or HIV easier. Other people with Hep C or HIV can tell you about how they live with the virus on a day-to-day basis.

You should also see a doctor or other health worker regularly. Hep C and HIV are serious health conditions that require medical care. Hep C damages your liver and you cannot live without your liver. Severe damage, called cirrhosis, can lead to liver failure or liver cancer. HIV weakens the immune system, making it harder for your body to fight off infections. These infections can kill you.



TOPICS:

Get connected, get care

Eating healthy

Exercising

Sleeping

Drugs, alcohol and smoking

Complementary therapies

Taking care of your emotional health

Dealing with pain

"I eat really well. I sleep. I don't go out and use every day. I saw a lot of my friends die - full-blown AIDS and they were still going out and using every night. All the people I used to hang out with are dead. So you come to the conclusion that eating, sleeping and not using every day is going to make you live longer." - Silke

Though you may not feel sick for many years with Hep C or HIV, the virus is still damaging your body. Having Hep C or HIV also puts you at risk for other health problems, including heart problems, diabetes and thyroid and bone problems.

The good news that there is a cure for Hep C that works for many people and there are medicines for HIV that control the virus. By seeing a doctor or other health worker regularly you can live a long and healthy life.

If you want more info on services in your area, check out CATIE's website www.catie.ca or call us at 1-800-263-1638 (we accept collect calls from prisons in Canada).

Eating healthy

Eating a healthy diet is one key way you can support your health. This can be hard if you don't have a lot of money or if you don't have a safe place to live, but there are some cheap ways to get the food you need.

- Try to eat some **fruit or vegetables every day**. Fruits and vegetables are cheaper when they are in season. For example, apples and carrots are in season in the fall, and spinach and plums are in season in the summer. For some people, picking berries is part of their culture and a great way to eat more fresh fruit.
- Try to eat some **protein every day**. Inexpensive kinds include peanut butter, beans, eggs, tofu and canned fish like tuna. If hunting and fishing is something you do where you live or is a part of your culture, this can be a good way to get protein.
- Bread and pasta are cheap and give you energy; look for **whole-grain products**, such as brown bread or whole wheat or rice pasta.
- **No fridge or stove?** There are lots of foods that are healthy, keep for a while and don't require much cooking, such as bread and bagels, peanut butter and nuts, granola bars, powdered milk, canned tuna or salmon, canned beans, raisins, bananas and apples.
- When you are **using drugs**, drink high-calorie drinks like milkshakes,

chocolate milk or soy milk. Eat as well as you can.

- **Plan ahead.** Try to buy groceries that last a long time like oatmeal, peanut butter, canned soups and stews before spending money on drugs.
- Ask friends, health workers and counsellors about **food sources**—they may know about soup kitchens, food banks, food share or food box services that give out free groceries.

If you're having health problems like losing weight, feeling sick, throwing up or having diarrhea, check out online or order *A Practical Guide to Nutrition for People Living with HIV* at www.catie.ca for practical tips. The guide also has a section on addiction and recovery.

Drinking water

Try to drink lots of water every day, especially if you're drinking alcohol or taking ecstasy, cocaine or speed. This may not be easy if you do not have access to clean drinking water. Healthy juices or milk are good options in this case. Water can help your body process nutrients and makes getting rid of waste less work for your liver. Not getting enough water (dehydration) can make you feel tired. Alcohol, coffee and other drinks with caffeine (such as soda pop) don't count because they actually make your body lose water.

Multivitamins

Multivitamins can give your body extra vitamins when you can't eat healthy all the time. Check with your doctor before you start taking them. To save money you could buy a cheap store brand or check with a community health organization, clinic or pharmacy to see if they give them out for free. In some cases, vitamins are covered by provincial or private health insurance.

Exercising

Exercise increases your energy level and reduces stress. Start with something simple that you know you enjoy doing, like going for a walk, dancing or swimming in a public pool.

Sometimes people taking Hep C or HIV treatment feel really tired. If you feel this way, do simple stretches while sitting down or walk for a few minutes. Every little bit helps.

Some people already get lots of exercise every day. This is often true if you are homeless and walking a lot just to get around.

Sleeping

Sleep helps your body heal and fight infections. Drugs like crack, cocaine, speed and crystal meth make you feel more alert and good about yourself for a while, but they can also make it hard to sleep. Some Hep C or HIV meds can also affect your sleep. The stress of living with Hep C or HIV may cause sleep problems, too. Finally, people with Hep C who have severe liver damage tend to have more problems sleeping. Here are a few things that might help you sleep better.

- If you are out partying, consider stopping your drug use a few hours before the party is over so you can sleep after.
- If you are using for a stretch of time, try to limit the number of days you go without sleeping.
- Try to go to sleep at the same time each night; this will help your body get into a rhythm of sleeping.
- Try to create a ritual before you go to sleep, such as drinking a glass of milk, listening to relaxing music or reading a book. This will help remind your body that it is time to go to sleep.
- If you have trouble sleeping for long stretches, take naps.
- If you are sleeping outside, try to stay warm, dry and out of the wind. Try to keep your head, feet and hands covered.
- If you are sleeping in a shelter, try to get there early enough to get a spot in a quieter area.

“Even if you are going to use, still take time out to eat and sleep, shower, right? Take care of life's responsibilities, too.” — Nancy

Drugs, alcohol and smoking

Drugs, alcohol and smoking are hard on your body. They can harm your liver and weaken your immune system. Living with Hep C or HIV means your body is already strained by the infection, so it's especially important to take care of your liver and your immune system. Some people decide to change their drug use, drink or smoke less, or quit altogether once they find out they have Hep C or HIV.

Finding out you have Hep C or HIV might lead you to think about **changing the way you use drugs**. You might use less. You might switch to less harmful drugs, like marijuana (pot). You might talk to your doctor about substitution therapy, like methadone or buprenorphine. You might decide to stop using. Whatever your choice, know that there are people who can help you.

Drinking less alcohol is one of the best things you can do for your health, especially when you have Hep C. Not drinking also improves the chances of Hep C treatment working. If you want to make this change in your life, try different strategies to discover what works for you. You might:

- Set a drinking goal you think you can manage and try to stick to it.
- Space out alcoholic drinks with non-alcoholic drinks such as water.
- Switch to smaller drinks or drinks with lower alcohol content (a three percent instead of five percent beer, for example).
- Water down hard alcohol by mixing it with juice, soda pop or water.
- Seek support through a support group, addiction treatment or counselling.

Smoking is also very hard on your body. It can be hard to stop or cut back because nicotine in cigarettes is very addictive, but it is an important thing you can do to improve your health. If you want help to quit smoking or cut down, you can contact the Smokers' Helpline, 1-877-513-5333.

“Going down on alcohol is number one. It really kills your liver. I almost drank myself to death.” — Nancy

Complementary therapies

Some examples of complementary therapies are acupuncture, massage, meditation and Aboriginal traditional healing practices, such as sweat lodges and medicinal herbs. Complementary therapies cannot cure your Hep C or

HIV but they can help your liver and your immune system, reduce stress and help you manage the side effects and symptoms of the infection.

Some complementary therapies may be offered for free at community health organizations, networks for people who use drugs, or harm reduction programs.

If you want to take medicinal herbs or other supplements, check first with your doctor or pharmacist because some may interact with your Hep C or HIV medications. Your medications may stop working or the side effects might become worse.

For more information, check out “Hep C and Complementary Therapies” at www.catie.ca or order *A Practical Guide to Complementary Therapies for People Living with HIV* at www.catie.ca.

Taking care of your emotional health

Using drugs can cause emotional highs and lows. You may also face other things in life that upset your emotional health. Depression and anxiety happen to many people. Also, side effects from Hep C and HIV treatment can make people feel low (depressed) or anxious. There are ways to make the lows from using drugs easier to manage and ways to treat depression and anxiety. The most important thing

is to know that you are not alone. Help is available. Talk to someone you trust.

Making the lows less hard. Some people who use drugs recommend preparing for the lows so that when you feel anxious or depressed you have a few things ready to take care of yourself. Apart from your dope kit, you could also create a “down kit” containing things that help you relax such as calming music, a funny movie, a recording of a meditation exercise or a

Finding out you have Hep C or HIV might lead you to think about changing the way you use drugs.

special item that gives you strength. For some people, being in nature helps them to relax. Getting enough sleep, eating as healthy as you can, spending time with people who care about you and getting some exercise on a regular basis can also make the lows easier to manage. A peer or harm reduction worker can also talk with you about strategies for dealing with the lows.

Sometimes the lows can be really bad. If you are really down or feel like hurting yourself or killing yourself, talk to someone you trust about how you are feeling. Visit a doctor, community health organization, harm reduction program, emergency department, social worker or other place you feel safe to talk about your thoughts and feelings. It takes courage, but you can cope better with these feelings with a bit of help. You can also call the emergency phone number in your area (often 911).

Dealing with the mental health effects of treatment. Depression is a common side effect of some Hep C treatment, and some HIV drugs can change your mood. If you are considering going on Hep C treatment that includes peg-interferon and you've had depression, talk to your doctor about this before you start treatment. Treatment guidelines for Hep C suggest starting antidepressants before treatment with peg-interferon if there is a risk of depression.

If you are on HIV treatment and you think it is affecting your feelings and mental health, talk to your doctor about what is happening. There may be other HIV medications you could use. Some people find that talking to a counsellor or social worker on a regular basis (talk therapy) can be helpful for treating depression and anxiety.

Dealing with pain

People with Hep C or HIV often experience pain at some point. Treating pain when you use drugs can be tough because you may have a high pain tolerance or because some doctors don't want to give pain medicine to people who use drugs.

People who use heroin or who are on methadone or buprenorphine may have a higher pain tolerance and may need a higher dose of pain medication. Some doctors may assume that if you are on either methadone or buprenorphine you don't feel pain, so they won't give you enough pain medicine. If a doctor assumes that your pain is related to your drug use or thinks you are just looking for pain medicines to get high, he or she might not treat it.

If you are having trouble working with your doctor to manage your pain, try to talk to your doctor clearly and openly about the pain and your drug use. You might bring a friend, peer or healthcare

worker with you for support. Take notes about what the pain is like, such as:

- Where is the pain?
- How bad is it on a scale of 1 to 10?
- When does the pain happen?
- When does it feel better?
- Does it stop you from doing your daily tasks—for example, getting dressed, cooking or working?

If you have Hep C, be careful with acetaminophen (Tylenol). It can be hard on your liver and large doses could be a problem if you have a lot of liver damage. Talk to your doctor about what pain medications are right for you.

Working with a doctor and other health workers

TOPICS:

Finding a doctor

Making it work if you can't switch doctors

Time for a team?

Finding a doctor

Finding a doctor and getting healthcare will help you stay healthy with Hep C (hepatitis C) or HIV. It may take time, and trial and error, to find a doctor and make it work. If you've had bad experiences in the past with doctors, it may be hard to give them a chance. But there are doctors who will treat you well; you just have to find one who you connect with.

You have the right to expect respectful care from your doctor:

- You deserve to be treated with respect and not be judged for your drug use.
- Your doctor should treat you whether or not you are using drugs.
- Your doctor should not be afraid to touch you.
- Your doctor should explain things clearly and should listen to you.
- Your doctor should allow you to make decisions about your medical treatment.

You may need to remind your doctor of these things. Some people find it helpful to bring along a friend, peer or harm reduction worker to their appointments to support them.

Remember that you are part of the solution. Speak to the doctor and his or her staff with respect. They may not know “the street” or much about the things you know. They may even be a bit afraid because of the false images they've seen on TV or in movies. They have to get to know you and trust you, too. Not all doctors know about Hep C, HIV and drug use — yours should, or at least should be open to learning.

You can also do things to get ready for your appointments:

- Consider using a health journal to list symptoms, medications, allergies, appointments, and more. CATIE has a



“I love my doctor. I found him through word of mouth. It's the best way to find your doctor – ask somebody with HIV. Ask a few people, because what's good for me may not be what's good for you. You and your doctor really need to work together, because if you're working against each other, you won't get the best care you deserve.” – Cindy

personal health record you might want to use. You can find it in *Managing Your Health* at www.catie.ca.

- Make a list of questions you want to ask before the appointment.
- Show up a bit early for your appointment.
- Phone the office as far ahead as possible to tell them if you are going miss your appointment.

If you are trying to work with your doctor and aren't getting the care you want, talk to your doctor about this, or ask other people who use drugs for the name of their doctors, or ask at a harm reduction program for the name of another doctor.

Making it work if you can't switch doctors

Sometimes you can't switch doctors, especially if you live in a rural area or if there are waiting lists for doctors. This can be frustrating, but there is a lot you can do to get the healthcare you need by working with your doctor as best you can and by asking for help from other people and organizations.

Working with your doctor:

- Try to be as patient as you can with your doctor.
- Try to be honest with your doctor as much as you can about your drug use, because it could interact with your treatment.
- Try to be open about how often you are taking your medications because that affects how well they work. Your doctor can help you if you are having problems taking your meds.
- Speak up for what you need or bring a friend, peer or harm reduction worker to support you.

- Remember it is OK to "agree to disagree" with your doctor.
- Take responsibility for going to appointments and taking your meds.
- If you and the doctor speak different languages, you might need to bring someone to help with translation.

Rely on other organizations and people to get support, care and answers to your questions:

- Nurses can also give you healthcare and may have more time than doctors.
- Use other healthcare workers, such as social workers and pharmacists.
- Visit your local community health organization for help.
- Get connected to other people living with Hep C or HIV to find out how they are managing their health. Some community health organizations and harm reduction programs have people who use drugs who can answer questions about Hep C and HIV (often called peer workers).
- Call CATIE at 1-800-263-1638 to get info about Hep C or HIV.

Time for a team?

Some people who use drugs find it helpful to have a team of people to support them, especially when starting treatment for Hep C or HIV. There are many people who could be on your care team, such as:

Nurses can sometimes give you your treatment, do monitoring tests, answer questions and help you with other health problems you are having.

Outreach workers or **community health representatives** can help you find the services you need in the healthcare system.

Peer workers often have experience living with Hep C, HIV or both and have experience using drugs. They have lots of knowledge they can share with you from their own life about what it's like to take treatment and deal with side effects as well as how to use drugs safely.

Pharmacists can tell you if the medications and street drugs you are taking will work together or cause problems for you. They can also answer questions about how to take your medications, help you deal with the side effects of treatment, and answer any other questions you have about treatment.

Psychiatrists can help with mental health issues. They can provide talk therapy and, when needed, medication.

Social workers can talk with you about the hard things you are dealing with and can help you find things like housing, food and money.

It may be impossible to build a team because these people are not available, or it may be difficult to trust them. It may take some time to build your team. The key message is that the more support you have, the better you'll be able to take care of your health. You might want to start by talking to a social worker or peer worker; they may be able to help you connect with other healthcare workers that you want to have on your team.

Treatment for Hep C or HIV

Tracking your health

If you're seeing a doctor regularly, they will be tracking your health. This will help you make decisions about treatment for Hep C (hepatitis C) or HIV. Your doctor may also monitor other health issues such as your mental wellness, other infections and your heart and lungs.

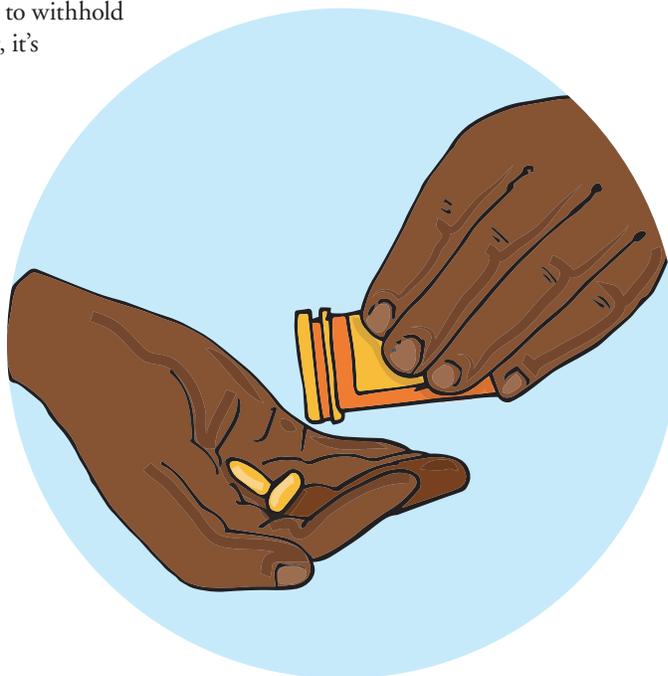
The main tests for Hep C are liver function tests, to see how healthy your liver is, and tests to see whether the Hep C virus is causing other health issues, such as diabetes or kidney or thyroid problems.

The main tests for HIV are the CD4 count, which measures the strength of your immune system, and the HIV viral load test, which measures how much HIV is in your blood.

What is Hep C treatment?

There is a cure for Hep C (although there is no vaccine). People often talk about clearing the virus; this is the same as a cure.

People who use injection drugs have been successfully treated for Hep C. Treatment guidelines for Hep C—the official recommendations that doctors use to guide their decisions about treatment—say that using streets drugs is not a reason to withhold Hep C treatment. However, it's important to be as stable as possible, because you need to be able to follow the medication schedule to give yourself the best chance of clearing the virus. Not everyone with Hep C decides to take treatment. For some people, liver damage happens so slowly that they decide not to take treatment right away. Talk to your doctor about what treatment options are best for you.



TOPICS:

Tracking your health

What is Hep C treatment?

What is HIV treatment?

What if you have both Hep C and HIV?

Treatment and prison

Starting treatment

"For so long, as drug users we've been told that doctors can't help us. We need to let people know that that is actually not the case. There are treatment options. Just because you are using does not mean you are not eligible for treatment."

— Jennifer

Treatment for Hep C means taking a combination of medications. Some treatments involve getting an injection under the skin once a week and taking pills every day. Some treatments involve only taking pills. There are new treatments approved in Canada. These drugs increase the chance that treatment will cure the infection and have fewer side effects. Depending on what strain of Hep C you have (there are six strains), treatment can last between eight weeks to one year.

CATIE has lots of up-to-date Hep C treatment information. Check out “Choosing a drug combination for chronic hepatitis C” and “Chronic hepatitis C treatment combinations” at www.catie.ca or call 1-800-263-1638.

What is HIV treatment?

HIV can be controlled but not cured. People who use injection drugs can take HIV treatment. The treatment guidelines for HIV—the official recommendations that doctors use to guide their decisions about treatment—say that using street drugs is not a reason to withhold HIV treatment. Talk to your doctor about what treatment options are best for you.

HIV treatment consists of a combination of drugs that is taken every day. These medications will decrease the amount of the HIV virus in your body (called HIV viral load) and will allow your body to build its defenses against other infections.

HIV is a lifelong disease, and treatment needs to be started at some point. You and your doctor will choose the best time and the best combination of drugs for you. While there are many different drugs, most people who start HIV treatment can take one or two pills a day. Be as honest as you can about your drug use with your doctor. Your doctor can also help you find a treatment that best fits your schedule and lifestyle. Some HIV medications may be more suitable with other prescriptions or street drugs you use.

CATIE provides a lot of information about HIV treatment. Visit catie.ca or call 1-800-263-1638.

It's important not to share your medications with anyone else who is also on HIV treatment. Even if the pills look similar they don't all work in the same way. If you switch medications on your own, they may stop working.

What if you have both Hep C and HIV?

Hep C and HIV are different viruses with different tests and treatments. If you are living with both viruses, both can be treated. Generally, you will start with HIV treatment first. Starting treatment for both viruses at the same time is not recommended. Check out online or order CATIE's booklet *Living with HIV and Hepatitis C Co-infection* for more info.

Treatment and prison

What if you're in prison and want to start treatment?

If you were on Hep C or HIV treatment before you went into prison, you have the right to continue treatment while in prison. If you would like to start treatment while you are in prison, you will need to get a prison doctor or specialist to prescribe Hep C or HIV medications for you, which will then be given to you by prison healthcare. Starting treatment may not be an option in provincial prisons. Some federal prisons have prisoners who are trained and available to talk to you about health issues (called peer health workers or peer education and counselling (PEC) workers).

If you have been receiving treatment in prison and are going to be released, try to get connected with a doctor or community health organization in the area where you are planning on living, so you can continue treatment. This can be hard if you don't know what community you will be released to. Prison healthcare staff should assist you with this, but you can also call PASAN (1-866-224-9978) for help finding support in or close to the community where you will live. Some prisons have prison outreach workers from local community health organizations who may also be able to assist with release planning.

Starting treatment

Starting treatment is a big decision. Your physical health is one of the main factors you will use to decide when to start, but you will also need to be ready to start and to stay on treatment. HIV treatment is a lifelong commitment that can keep you healthy if you take your medications consistently. And even though Hep C treatment is only for a set time, the more you can stick to treatment, the better your chances of clearing the virus.

Getting your life as stable as you can and finding support will help you manage these parts of treatment. You may need some time to put the right supports in place before you start treatment. Below is a list of questions that can help as you think about treatment:

How is your physical health?

Treatment can cure Hep C and can help you stay healthy with HIV. It is best to start treatment early, before you feel sick. This can be hard because you feel OK, but Hep C and HIV are damaging your body even while you feel well. Starting treatment sooner increases your chances of staying healthy.

How is your emotional health?

If you feel down a lot or have a history of depression, talk to your doctor about your options before you start treatment for Hep C or HIV. Treatment, especially Hep C treatment that includes peg-interferon, can cause depression in some people. Starting depression treatment before you go on Hep C treatment that includes peg-interferon can prevent depression and make it easier to stay on treatment.

Do you have the support you need?

Some people who use drugs find they can handle treatment better when they have a support group and a team of health workers to support them. Check with a community health organization about getting connected to a support group or a care team. Other people on treatment, family and friends can also help support you through the treatment process.

Getting your life as stable as you can and finding support will help you manage treatment.

Do you have spiritual or religious support if you need it?

Some people find that their spiritual or religious beliefs help them to cope as they start treatment. Are there people whom you want to support you as you start treatment, such as an Aboriginal Elder, an imam, a priest, a rabbi or other religious leader?

Do you have a plan to stick to your meds?

Think about what might help you or stop you from sticking to the medication schedule. Before you start treatment, you could practice your medication schedule with Smarties or another candy to get in the habit of taking them and to help you figure out any possible problems you might have. Maybe you will realize you want to change when you use drugs so that you can take your meds at the same time every day. Or maybe you need a place to keep your meds. Talk to your doctor, a peer worker or another worker about any possible difficulties and what could make it easier. For example, there are some treatments for HIV that involve taking only one pill once a day. Some health centres have programs that you go to daily to help you take your meds consistently.

Do you have a place to stay?

It can be easier to stick to treatment if you have a place to live. Having a place to live can also help some people to stabilize their drug use. If you don't have housing, is there a family member or friend you can stay with while you're starting treatment? A worker may also be able to help you access housing. If you can't find housing, it is still possible to go on Hep C or HIV treatment. You may need to find a place to store your medications, like a harm reduction program or a health centre. You may also be able to pick up your medication each day at the pharmacy.

Do you need help covering the cost of treatment?

Hep C and HIV drugs are expensive, however, there are programs that will cover the costs of medications if you meet the qualifications.

CATIE has information on "Access to HIV and Hepatitis C Drugs: Federal, Provincial and Territorial Drug Access Programs" at www.catie.ca.

Do you want to have children soon?

It is possible to keep your partner safe and have a healthy pregnancy and baby if you have Hep C or HIV. However, if you are taking Hep C treatment you will need to wait until six months after finishing treatment to try to have a baby because treatment can harm your unborn baby. The likelihood of passing on Hep C to your child is very low.

If you have HIV and are thinking of getting pregnant, experts recommend that you start taking HIV treatment before you get pregnant. With proper care and support, the risk of your baby getting HIV is less than two percent.

For more information on having a baby while using drugs, see the section "Pregnant or thinking about having a baby?" (page 29) in this guide.

For more information on having a baby when you have HIV, check out online or order the booklet, *You can have a healthy pregnancy if you are HIV positive* at www.catie.ca.

On treatment

Sticking to treatment

Treatment for Hep C (hepatitis C) or HIV means taking pills every day. Remembering to take pills every day can be hard, regardless of whether or not you are using drugs. However, missing doses is a problem for your treatment. If you have HIV, missing doses can allow the virus to become resistant to treatment. Once a virus is resistant to a certain drug, that drug will no longer work for you and you will have to change drugs. This means there will be fewer options for your treatment in the future. If you have Hep C, missing doses lowers the chance of treatment clearing the virus. It can also lead to resistance if you are taking the newer Hep C drugs called direct-acting antivirals.

If you are having trouble taking meds every day, check out this list of things you can do:

- **Learn about your meds.** Find out more about how your Hep C or HIV meds work and why it's important to take them. The more you understand about treatment, the more likely you are to stick to your schedule.
- **Learn about how to take your meds.** Find out when you have to take your meds and whether they have special instructions, such as taking them with food. Also, find out if they need special storage, such as being kept in the fridge. Ask your doctor, nurse or pharmacist to write all this information down for you.
- **Have extra doses on hand.** If you can, take extra doses with you when you go out or stash extra doses at places you regularly go to during the day like a harm reduction program or methadone clinic, just in case you need them.
- **Pick up your meds daily from your pharmacy.** Some pharmacies will let you pick up your medication every day. This is a good idea for people who don't have anywhere to store their pills.



TOPICS:

Sticking to treatment

How to tell if treatment is working

Using street drugs while on treatment

On other medications? Making sure it all works together

Managing Hep C or HIV treatment side effects

What do you do if you want to change your HIV treatment?

After Hep C treatment

- **Get a pillbox.** Use organizer gadgets like pillboxes so that you can organize your meds for the day or week. Using nail polish or tape, mark down the time you need to take the pills on the box.
- **Set an alarm for when you have to take your meds.** Set your cellphone, pager or watch to go off at the time you need to take your medication. You may be able to get your clinic or pharmacy to text you reminders to take your meds or ask a friend to remind you.
- **Talk about any problems you are having.** Your doctor, pharmacist, nurse or a peer worker can help you. Sometimes people feel like they are doing something wrong if they miss a dose, but many people need help to stick with treatment.
- **Ask about medication support programs.** You may be able to get support to help with sticking to your medication schedule (sometimes called adherence support programs).

How to tell if treatment is working

The treatments for Hep C or HIV are monitored using blood tests that check for levels of Hep C or HIV in the blood. These tests are called the Hep C viral load test and the HIV viral load test. For both Hep C and HIV, the goal of treatment is an “undetectable” viral load. Undetectable means different things for Hep C treatment and HIV treatment.

During Hep C treatment, Hep C viral load may be measured at different times. Ideally, the viral load will become undetectable by the end of treatment, though this is not always the case. With some medications, if your viral load drops in the early phases of treatment you are more likely to clear the virus. If Hep C viral load remains undetectable six months after completing treatment, you are said to have cleared the virus and to be cured of Hep C.

During HIV treatment, HIV viral load should drop and remain low. Most people are able to reach an undetectable HIV viral load within three to four months of starting treatment. With HIV,

undetectable does *not* mean you are cured of the virus. HIV is still in your body and the virus can still pass on to other people.

Once HIV is under control, the immune system can get stronger and CD4 counts usually increase. Often, the CD4 count does not change as quickly as the HIV viral load. If your HIV viral load never becomes undetectable or it begins to increase you may need to change the combination of HIV medications you are taking.

Using street drugs while on treatment

Hep C and HIV meds can change the way street drugs affect your body. Some of the medications boost the effect of street drugs. If you are planning on using after you start treatment, consider starting to use slowly. Try half a hit of what you normally use and then wait to see how it affects you.

Hep C and HIV meds can change the way street drugs affect your body.

Certain drugs can cause serious harm if you are taking HIV meds. For example, ketamine, or K, can damage your liver. Consider stopping or switching to a different drug when you start HIV treatment.

If you are taking HIV meds and are on methadone, it’s important to know that some HIV meds decrease the strength of methadone, which means you could go into withdrawal. HIV meds can also change the amount of buprenorphine in your body. Check with your doctor about whether your dose needs to be adjusted.

Using street drugs may make it harder to remember to take your medications, but there are many tricks you can use to keep to your medication schedule. Street drugs can also change the way Hep C or HIV medications work. Be as open as you can with your doctor about the street drugs you use.

If you’re using certain drugs while taking Hep C medications, the meds may not work as well and you’ll have a lower chance of clearing the virus. If you’re using certain drugs while taking HIV medications, the virus may become resistant to the meds and you will need to change medications. Talking openly to your doctor can help you learn what’s safe to use, so your Hep C or HIV treatment will be effective.

Although there isn’t a lot of information on how Hep C and HIV meds interact with different street drugs and alcohol, it’s still a good idea to talk to your doctor, nurse or pharmacist about all the drugs you are taking. While we don’t know all the possible interactions, he or she may be able to give you information about ones we do know about. You can also ask people who use drugs and are on Hep C and HIV meds about their experiences.

On other medications? Making sure it all works together

Sometimes when people have more than one health issue the medications they take can react with each other. These are called drug-drug interactions. This means that one medication can change how another medication works and can affect the side effects it causes.

Talk to your doctor or pharmacist about all the medications you take — including herbal medicines, vitamins and supplements and over-the-counter drugs — so they can spot potential drug-drug interactions. Using the same pharmacy to get all of your medications can also help prevent drug-drug interactions.

Managing Hep C or HIV treatment side effects

All drugs have potential side effects, although not everyone will experience side effects. Some of the side effects from Hep C or HIV treatment can feel like withdrawal, so you'll need to pay attention to your body more carefully when you start treatment. Common side effects of Hep C and HIV treatment include tiredness, depression, diarrhea and nausea.

Certain side effects are more common with particular drugs, for example, flu-like symptoms with the Hep C drug interferon, and diarrhea with the HIV drug ritonavir (Norvir). The good news is that over time side effects often lessen.

If you are having trouble dealing with side effects, don't stop taking your meds. Instead, talk to your doctor, nurse or pharmacist. There are many things you can do to manage side effects and stay

on treatment. Complementary therapies such as herbal medicines and Aboriginal traditional medicines can also help with side effects. If you are planning on taking any of these, talk to your doctor beforehand to make sure they will not interact with your Hep C or HIV meds.

Below is a list of common Hep C and HIV medication side effects and how you can manage them.

Hep C medication side effect	Description	What you can do
Feeling low or down (depression)	Depression is when you feel really sad for a couple of weeks or months. It's different from regular sadness because you can also feel hopeless and not take much pleasure in the things that used to make you happy. You also may feel like you don't have much energy.	Talk to your doctor or mental health worker. For some people antidepressant medication, talk therapy or both are helpful. Try to get as much support from friends and family as you can.
Extreme tiredness (fatigue)	Some people describe this as feeling totally "wiped out." Some people feel like this every day and other people have good days and bad days.	Start a gentle exercise program if you are not exercising already. This will prevent you from losing your strength and stamina. Choose times of the day when you have more energy to exercise. Talk to your doctor about feeling tired. It may be a sign of anemia (low red blood cell count), which needs medical treatment.
Flu-like symptoms	Your muscles may feel sore and your joints may ache. You may also have a fever and chills. Some people sweat a lot at night while they are sleeping.	Take your peg-interferon injection in the evening. Drink lots of water. Talk to your doctor to see which over-the-counter pain or cold medicine is right for you. Often flu-like symptoms will decrease a couple weeks after starting treatment.
Itchy skin	An itchy skin rash may show up on your feet and hands. Some people feel itchy all over their body.	Try to rub your skin instead of scratching it. Talk to your doctor about antihistamines and anti-itch creams. Avoid hot baths and showers. Use warm water instead. Drink lots of water.

For more info on other side effects from Hep C meds and how to manage them, see "Managing Side Effects" at www.catie.ca.

HIV medication side effect	Description	What you can do
Nausea	This is the very unpleasant feeling of being sick to your stomach and wanting to throw up.	<p>Don't skip meals, but eat many small meals. Try eating foods like bananas, dry toast, apples, rice, noodles or soup. Avoid greasy foods and milk products.</p> <p>Take many sips of water. Try to drink about two litres of water throughout the day.</p> <p>Ask your doctor about medications to control nausea.</p>
Headache	This is when you have pain in your head. The pain may feel dull, sharp or throbbing and it may last for a short time or a long time.	<p>If you have headaches that are severe, last for more than a few hours or come back often, you should tell your doctor and visit a specialist.</p> <p>Check with your doctor about which pain medications are OK for you to take.</p> <p>Headaches can happen when you don't drink enough water or eat often enough. Be sure you are drinking enough liquids.</p>
Diarrhea	This is when you have loose or watery poo. Losing too much water from your body can cause dehydration.	<p>Drink lots of water. Avoid drinks with caffeine like coffee, tea and pop.</p> <p>Eat bananas, plain rice, dry toast and applesauce.</p> <p>Talk to your doctor about medications to help control diarrhea.</p>
Skin rash	A rash or itchy skin may develop during the first few weeks of taking HIV medications.	Most often, a rash or itchy skin will go away on its own. However, a rash may be a sign of an allergic reaction to a medication. Report any rash to your doctor immediately.

For more info on other side effects from HIV meds and how to manage them, check out online or order *A Practical Guide to Managing HIV Drug Side Effects* at www.catie.ca.

What do you do if you want to change your HIV treatment?

If you find that your HIV medication is not decreasing your HIV viral load, the side effects are too hard to handle or it is hard to stick to the treatment schedule, you may want to switch treatments. Work closely with your doctor to figure out what treatment could work better for you.

Check out online “Changing treatments” in *A Practical Guide to HIV Drug Treatment* at www.catie.ca or order a copy of the guide.

After Hep C treatment

After you've completed Hep C treatment, you will have a final Hep C viral detection test three or six months later to see if it was successful. This test is important

because it is the one that confirms you have cleared the virus. Regardless of the outcome, there are things you can do to live well after Hep C treatment.

If treatment cleared the virus:

Depending on the health of your liver, your doctor may want to test you for liver cancer on a regular basis. If you have liver damage, you may experience some of the effects of that damage, such as tiredness or problems concentrating. For many people, the liver will heal itself over time.

If you have cleared the Hep C virus, you can get Hep C again. Going through Hep C treatment won't protect you in the future. Knowing how Hep C can pass from person to person will help you take steps to protect yourself and others. Check out the sections “Making drug use safer” (page 24) and “Making sex safer” (page 27) in this guide to learn more.

“I have done the treatment successfully and that definitely does not mean that I'll never get Hep C again. If I'm not careful just like anybody else, I will get Hep C.” — Bill

If treatment did not clear the virus:

If you tried treatment and it didn't work, you may feel lots of different emotions like anger, frustration or sadness. You may want to talk to a friend, peer, counsellor or family member about how you are feeling. Focus on doing what you can to reduce liver damage and to live and feel well. Check out the section “Living as healthy as you can with Hep C or HIV” (page 11) in this guide. You may want to try treatment again in the future.

Making drug use safer

Safer drug use: taking care of yourself

There are many things you can do to take care of yourself when you're using drugs.

Find a safe place to use

Find a place that is warm, has good lighting and where you won't be rushed, so you won't mess up your veins. Have a friend close by who can look after you if you need it.

Learn how to inject yourself

If you don't know how to inject yourself, ask someone you trust (for example, a street nurse or a peer worker) to show you how. When you can't inject yourself, you are dependent on someone else to get high. You might be forced to share equipment, which increases the chance of getting Hep C (hepatitis C) or HIV. You might also be last on the needle and you might not get as much of the drug as you would like. Needing someone else to help you get high can give them power over you, and you may end up doing something you don't want to do in order to get their help. Check out "Safer injection" at www.catie.ca for more information on how to inject safely.



TOPICS:

Safer drug use: taking care of yourself

Safer drug use: taking care of others

Injecting hormones?
How to do it safely

Dealing with pressure to share needles and other injection equipment

What about when you can't get new needles or other injection equipment?

"I was lucky when I started injecting. This guy injected me first but he made me watch everything, and he said 'You gotta know how to do this; this is the first and only time I will do this for you.'"

— Jennifer

“Make sure that your equipment is all yours and no one else’s. You want to share your dope? Divide it up beforehand. Don’t divide on your spoon, because even on your spoon you can catch [stuff].” — Rose

Buy your own drugs

If someone buys your drugs for you, consider making your own connection with the dealer. This way you won’t be dependent on someone else to buy you drugs if you are going into withdrawal, which may be a situation where you are more likely to share a needle or other drugs use equipment. If you are buying drugs from a new dealer, test a little bit of the drug before injecting your usual amount to make sure it feels OK in your body.

Start slow

If you haven’t used in a while or are starting Hep C or HIV treatment, it’s a good idea to start out with a small dose or a small tester shot. If you haven’t used

heartbeat. Mixing a downer and an upper or stimulant (like crack, cocaine or crystal meth) can cause your liver to fail.

For more information on what different kinds of drugs do to your body and how to avoid an overdose, check out “Information on street drugs” at www.catie.ca.

Don’t judge yourself for using

Try not to judge yourself or get down on yourself for using drugs, even if others judge you. Some people find that they are able to use drugs more safely when they accept themselves and their drug use.

Safer drug use: taking care of others

Sharing, lending or borrowing equipment for using drugs can spread Hep C and HIV. This is because used equipment can have blood on it, and even invisible amounts of blood carrying Hep C or HIV can spread these viruses when

- **If you smoke drugs, you can lower the risk by using your own pipe or stem, mouthpiece and screens** and trying not to share with other people. Pyrex pipes are safest because they don’t break as easily or get as hot as other materials. Use a mouthpiece, like a piece of tubing or a rubber band. This keeps the stem cool.
- **If you snort drugs, you can decrease the risk by using your own equipment** and trying not to share with anyone. Consider using items you can throw away, such as rolled up post-it notes or a straw.
- It is not clear whether sniffing glue, gas or other solvents is linked to passing Hep C or HIV, but you can use solvents more safely. **If you sniff or huff glue, gas or other solvents, use paper bags instead of plastic bags.** Plastic bags can melt and be inhaled. Use your own bag. Avoid sharing it. Use a rag instead of the sleeve of your coat or shirt. Use a new rag as often as you can. Carry a sandwich bag for your rag. When you go inside a building put your rag in the bag. This will keep it moist and decrease the solvent smell. Don’t smoke cigarettes while you are huffing.
- **Learn about the signs of overdosing** and how to take care of someone who is overdosing. Check out “Information on street drugs” online at www.catie.ca.

Sharing, lending or borrowing equipment for using drugs can spread Hep C and HIV.

a drug in a while because you were in jail, treatment, the hospital or for another reason, you will be more sensitive to it. Taking more than your body can handle could lead to overdose.

Stick to one drug

Sometimes people use more than one drug at a time or they use street drugs while drinking alcohol. Depending on what you are taking, this can be dangerous because different drugs and alcohol can mix in ways that are hard on your body and can lead to overdose. It is safer to take more of your favourite drug than to mix drugs.

Taking more than one downer or depressant (like alcohol, benzodiazepines, heroin and other opiates) at a time increases the risk of overdose because they slow down your breathing and

there is contact with another person’s bloodstream. There are things you can do to lower the chance of Hep C and HIV passing when using drugs:

- **Consider using drugs that you can swallow, eat or snort** instead of inject because they are less risky for passing on Hep C and HIV if you share your injection equipment.
- **If you inject drugs, you can lower the risk by using new needles, syringes, cookers, filters, water, swabs and ties (tourniquets)** as often as you can. You can also have your own equipment and try not to share it.
- **After you shoot, recap the needle and put it in a sealed container** like a pop bottle, so nobody can use it again. Bring it to a harm reduction program or give it to an outreach worker. Do not dump it where someone could find it and get hurt.

Injecting hormones? How to do it safely

Sometimes people need needles for reasons other than injecting street drugs, such as, trans people who inject estrogen or testosterone. Hep C and HIV can be passed through sharing needles used for these hormones, so try to use only your own needles. Some harm reduction programs or pharmacies carry the right size of needles for hormone injections. If you have to share a needle, check out the section “What about when you can’t get new needles or injection equipment?” on the next page.

Dealing with pressure to share needles and other injection equipment

People who use injection drugs have come up with lots of strategies to deal with the pressure to share needles and other injection equipment. Here are some of their ideas, but you also probably have some of your own:

- Inject drugs with a person who won't pressure you to share needles or other injection drug equipment.
- Avoid situations where people will want you to share your drugs.
- Bring extra new needles or injection equipment for other people if you are using in a group.
- Teach the people you use with how to inject safely.
- Encourage partners and friends to bring a "wake-up bag" of drugs so they don't ask to share your drugs when they wake up in the morning.
- Consider coming up with a budget for your rent, food and drugs, so you know how much money you have to spend on drugs. This will help you avoid going into withdrawal, which can lead to sharing needles because you are desperate for a fix.

"I used to be a smoker. I have my personal [pipe] and I always have a couple of spares, so if someone don't have one or whatever I give'em one." — Nancy

What about when you can't get new needles or other injection equipment?

Living in a rural area or any place without a harm reduction program can make it hard to get new needles and other injection equipment and not to share, but there are things you can do to be safer if you can't get a new needle or other injection equipment:

- Change up how you take your drugs, or try switching to drugs you can swallow (parachute), eat, smoke or snort until you can get new injection equipment. Stock up on needles, cookers, filters, water, swabs and ties when you can get to a harm reduction program. Stock up on pipes or stems, mouthpieces and screens if you inhale drugs.
- Keep your own needle or syringe to re-use and don't let anyone else use it. Mark it with tape, a marker or nail polish so you know it is yours. Rinse the needle with cold water after you use it so blood does not dry in the

syringe and clog it. (This will not kill Hep C or HIV.) Try not to share cookers, cottons, ties, water, pipes or stems or any other equipment because blood on these items can also transmit infections.

- If you re-use a needle, sharpening it will reduce barbs that can cause vein tears and scars. To sharpen a needle, get some clean water and a matchbook. Draw some water into the syringe. Run the bevel side (the angled edge) of the needle along the striking strip two or three times. Flip over the needle and run the tip once along the strip. Push the water out through the needle. Clean it with an alcohol swab. Before injecting, wet the needle with sterilized water to lubricate it.
- You can clean drug injection equipment with bleach before sharing but only use this strategy as a last resort. Bleach can kill HIV and some bacteria but **bleach does not kill Hep C**. To clean a needle, flush it twice with clean water, twice with full-strength bleach and twice with new water. Each flush should last 30 seconds. To clean cookers and spoons soak them in bleach for at least 30 seconds and rinse with water.

Making sex safer

HIV, Hep C and safer sex

Using some drugs and alcohol can make you feel sexy. Together with your sex partner you can make decisions about the level of risk and safer sex practices that you feel are right for you.

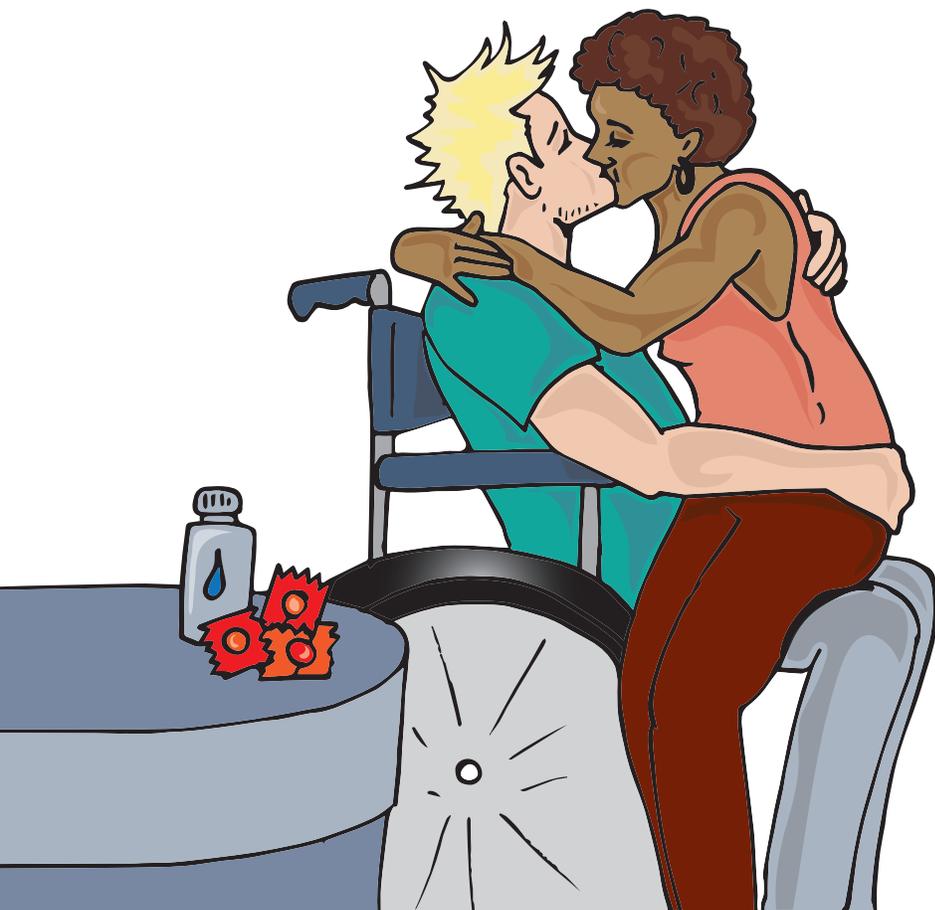
The chance of **HIV** passing during sex depends on different factors, including:

- **The kind of sex you're having**

HIV passes most easily during condomless anal sex and vaginal or frontal¹ sex. HIV can also pass when sharing sex toys. The risk of HIV passing during oral sex is usually low, although other sexually transmitted infections (STIs) can be easily transmitted this way. Cuts, sores or inflammation in the mouth or throat or on or inside the genitals can increase the risk during oral sex.

- **Condoms**

Using a condom and lots of water-based lube prevents the spread of HIV. Put a condom on sex toys and change it when using them on a different person. Change condoms frequently and use a new one with each partner.



TOPICS:

HIV, Hep C and safer sex

What if you can't ask someone to use a condom?

Sex work and drug use

- **HIV treatment and viral load**
If you're on HIV treatment and have an undetectable viral load, the risk of HIV passing to a partner is lower.
- **If either partner has another STI**
STIs can infect the genitals, anus, mouth and throat. Having an STI can increase the chance of HIV passing during sex. Get tested regularly for STIs and get treated.

It is rare to get **Hep C** (hepatitis C) through sex, although it is possible when there is a chance of blood being present. Anal sex without a condom, group sex and using drugs during sex have all been linked to passing on Hep C during sex among men, particularly gay men who are HIV positive.

What if you can't ask someone to use a condom?

Sometimes it doesn't feel safe to ask the person you are having sex with to use a condom. If this is the case, there are still things you can do to protect yourself.

- You could try to get your sex partner to have types of sex that are less risky for getting HIV, such as oral sex or hand jobs.
- Use lots of lube when you have sex because this reduces the chances of tearing of the walls of your vagina, front hole² or ass.

HIV can pass during condomless sex. It is rare for Hep C to pass through sex, though it is possible, especially when you have anal sex without a condom and have other STIs.

- Some people who have vaginal sex, front hole sex or anal sex may want to use a type of condom that is put inside the body, sometimes called the "female condom," to give themselves more control.
- Your local community health organization or community health clinic may give out "female condoms" for free. You can also get regular condoms at community health organizations.

If it is hard to ask the person you are having sex with to use a condom because you are worried they will become angry or violent, consider talking to someone you trust about how you are feeling. Talking with a social worker or counsellor is also a way to get some support when you are dealing with this situation.

Sex work and drug use

If you use drugs while exchanging sex for things you need, it may be harder to stick to your limits with clients and take care of

yourself. Here are some things you can do to keep yourself safer:

- Consider setting limits on how much dope or alcohol you use when you're working.
- If you are using drugs and not sleeping for several days, it may be hard to be firm about your boundaries with clients. To protect yourself consider setting limits on how many days you will go without sleep.
- Use a good water-based lube with condoms. Some drugs dry out the mucous membranes in your vagina, front hole and ass. Tearing can make you vulnerable to HIV and other STIs.
- Do your best to negotiate the prices and working conditions you want, including condom use.
- If you can't negotiate for condom use, use lots of lube. You can put the lube on and in yourself ahead of time.
- If you are exchanging sex for money, try to get paid in cash in advance.

¹ Frontal sex is what is commonly referred to as vaginal sex. It is a term sometimes used by trans men who feel more comfortable with this language.

² The front hole is what is commonly referred to as the vagina. It is a term that is sometimes used by trans men who feel more comfortable with this language.

Pregnant or thinking about having a baby?

Can I have a healthy baby if I have Hep C or HIV?

Healthy pregnancies and healthy babies are possible for people who have Hep C (hepatitis C) or HIV.

Transmitting **Hep C** during pregnancy is very rare. However, the chances increase if you also have HIV. If you are going on Hep C treatment before you get pregnant, you need to wait six months after finishing treatment to get pregnant, because Hep C medication can harm your baby.

HIV can pass to a baby during pregnancy, birth or nursing. However with proper HIV treatment and care, the chances of having an HIV-positive baby are less than two percent.

Sometimes people make the difficult decision to end the pregnancy. There is a time limit as to when the procedure for ending the pregnancy can be done safely. If you are thinking about this option, you need to talk to a health worker as early as possible in the pregnancy.

How can drug use affect my baby?

All types of drugs and alcohol can have a negative effect on your unborn child. It is safer not to use drugs or to reduce the amount of drugs you use during pregnancy. If you decide you want to quit, talk to your doctor about the best way to do that, since quitting cold turkey could harm you and your unborn baby. If you are addicted to opiates, it is safer for you and your baby to be on methadone than to stop taking opiates and not go on methadone.



TOPICS:

Can I have a healthy baby if I have Hep C or HIV?

How can drug use affect my baby?

How can I take care of myself and my baby?

Can my child get HIV or Hep C if I breast feed or chest feed?

How can I take care of myself and my baby?

Getting good healthcare while you are pregnant, avoiding stress as much as possible, reducing or stopping your drug use, getting support, sleeping enough and eating healthy are some of the things you can do to take care of yourself and your baby.

Seeing a doctor or a nurse regularly while you are pregnant is one of the best things you can do for your baby. This type of care is called prenatal care. Getting regular prenatal care is important because your doctor will monitor your health and the health of your baby and can catch possible problems.

Some people get the message that they are a bad mother or parent if they are pregnant and use drugs. It can be really hard to hear that or think that about yourself. Try to remember that doing the best you can to take care of yourself and your baby is what is important, regardless of whether you can reduce or stop your drug use.

If you decide you want to quit using drugs while you're pregnant, talk to your doctor about the best way to do that.

As much as you can, try to avoid stressful situations. Getting as much support as you can from family, friends and social workers or counsellors can help you to decrease stress, take care of yourself and feel better about yourself as a parent.

Eating as much healthy food as you can and taking prenatal multivitamins that include folic acid (which is important for your baby's development) can also help to keep you and your baby healthy while you are pregnant.

Can my child get HIV or Hep C if I breastfeed or chest feed?

Breastfeeding or chest feeding¹ is generally not a risk for Hep C transmission to your

baby, but it is a risk for HIV. If you have HIV it's important to feed baby formula to your newborn child. If you can't afford baby formula, some provinces and territories or local organizations provide it for free. If not, talk to a peer or harm reduction worker to try to find another solution.

For more information on having a healthy pregnancy, check out www.catie.ca or order the CATIE booklet *You can have a healthy pregnancy if you are HIV positive*.

For more information about Hep C and breastfeeding check out "Pregnancy and breastfeeding: Are they safe?" at www.catie.ca.

¹ Chest feeding refers to nursing an infant using one's chest. It is a term sometimes used by people on the trans masculine spectrum who feel more comfortable with this language.

Beyond Hep C and HIV: other infections to know about

Sometimes it can be hard to tell the difference between problems related to injection drug use such as withdrawal and other illnesses like tuberculosis or hepatitis B or a sexually transmitted infection. This means you could miss an infection that needs treatment. To get the right diagnosis, try to talk with your health worker honestly about your drug use.

The following are some common infections among people who use drugs and what to do about them.



TOPICS:

Hepatitis B

Tuberculosis (TB)

Syphilis

Sexually transmitted infections

Abscesses, cellulitis and other infections

Hepatitis B (Hep B)

What is it?	Hep B is a virus that affects your liver.
How do you get it?	Condomless sex, and sharing needles and other injection equipment.
How do you know if you have it?	A blood test will show whether you have Hep B.
How can you protect yourself and others from Hep B?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ask your doctor to give you a Hep B vaccination to prevent you from getting Hep B. (You can get vaccinated for Hep A at the same time.)• Don't share your injection equipment.• Don't save or collect filters for doing a wash. (A wash is when filters are rinsed to get the drugs left in them to make another hit.)• Use condoms and dental dams for sex.• Avoid sharing personal items, such as razors and toothbrushes.
Treatment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sometimes people clear Hep B on their own and don't need treatment.• Medications called antivirals are used to treat Hep B. There is no cure for Hep B but medications can slow down or prevent the virus from harming your body.

Tuberculosis (TB)

What is it?	TB is caused by bacteria that mostly affects your lungs but also can harm other parts of your body such as your kidneys, spine and brain. There are two types of TB: "latent" TB, which means you have no symptoms and can't give it to others; and "active" TB, which means you may feel sick and can pass it on to others.
How do you get it?	TB is spread through the air when someone who has active TB coughs, sneezes, spits or talks very close to you and you breathe in the bacteria. One example of how it can be spread is through "shot-gunning" (inhaling and exhaling smoke) into someone else's mouth.
How do you know if you have it?	Diagnosis of TB includes a skin test and chest X-ray.
How can you protect yourself and others from TB?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• If you smoke or snort crack or cocaine, use your own pipe or straw.• If you smoke tobacco or pot, avoid sharing cigarettes or joints.• If you inject drugs, use new drug equipment and don't share it.• If you sniff glue or other solvents, use your own bag.
Treatment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• If you have latent TB, your doctor can give you medications to keep it from becoming active.• If you have active TB, your doctor can give you medications that can cure it.

Syphilis

What is it?	Syphilis is a sexually transmitted infection caused by bacteria. If left untreated, syphilis can hurt your heart, brain, liver and other organs and can cause death.
How do you get it?	Syphilis is spread when your lips, mouth, genitals or ass comes into contact with someone who has syphilis sores. Sores can happen on your lips and inside your mouth, genitals and ass. Syphilis can also pass through sharing equipment to inject drugs and from a pregnant person to their unborn child.
How do you know if you have it?	A blood test for syphilis will tell you if you have it. The infection can take between two to 12 weeks to show up in your blood.
How can you protect yourself and others from syphilis?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use condoms and dental dams when you are having sex.• If you inject drugs, use new drug equipment and don't share it.• Get tested for syphilis if you find out you are pregnant.
Treatment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Your doctor can give you antibiotics to treat syphilis.• If you also have HIV, it's important to get treated quickly because syphilis may get worse faster if you have HIV.

Sexually transmitted infections

Other sexually transmitted infections (STIs), such as chlamydia, gonorrhea and genital herpes, can be painful or uncomfortable. It is also easier to pass HIV during sex if either partner has an STI. For more info about testing and treatment, talk to your local health worker, check out sexualityandu.ca or order the booklet *STI: Sexually transmitted infections* at www.catie.ca.

Abscesses, cellulitis and other infections

Some infections are related to problems injecting drugs, like when you miss a vein or when dirt or germs get inside your body while you are injecting. **Abscesses and cellulitis** are infections that form around the area where you inject. They

To get the right diagnosis, try to talk to your health worker honestly about your drug use.

can be painful to deal with and make you feel sick. Very serious infections can happen in your **heart** (called endocarditis) and your **bones** (called osteomyelitis). These infections happen when germs get into your bloodstream and travel throughout your body. They can be hard to treat and can kill you.

In general, to avoid infections in the skin where you inject:

- Before you shoot, wash your hands and the injection site with soap and water. Use just water, alcohol pads or sani-wipes if that is all you have.
- Use new injection equipment every time you use drugs.

- Inject your drugs in as clean a place as you can find. There are germs on everything the needlepoint touches, including spit, fingers and clothes. The less it touches, the cleaner it is. Also, don't lick the needle.
- Use a different injection site each time you shoot — it helps save veins. Go back to sites you used only after they've had time to heal. Try to avoid dangerous injection sites on your body: groin, thighs, wrists, neck.

For more information on how to avoid infections when you inject drugs, check out "Safer injection" at www.catie.ca.

Resources

CATIE is Canada's source for HIV and hepatitis C information. Our website www.catie.ca contains information on all aspects of living with HIV or Hep C.

Or call us at 1-800-263-1638. We can provide information over the phone (all calls are confidential) and can send you publications and print copies of any information on our website.

Specific print publications of interest include:

- *Treat Me Right: Getting treated for Hep C or HIV if you inject drugs*
- *What Works: Tips for taking care of yourself if you have Hep C or HIV and inject drugs*
- *Managing your health: a guide for people living with HIV*
- Our practical guides for people living with HIV, on the topics of HIV drug treatment, HIV drug side effects, long-term health and nutrition
- *You can have a healthy pregnancy if you are HIV positive*
- *Healthy Living with Viral Hepatitis*
- *Living with HIV and Hepatitis C Co-infection*

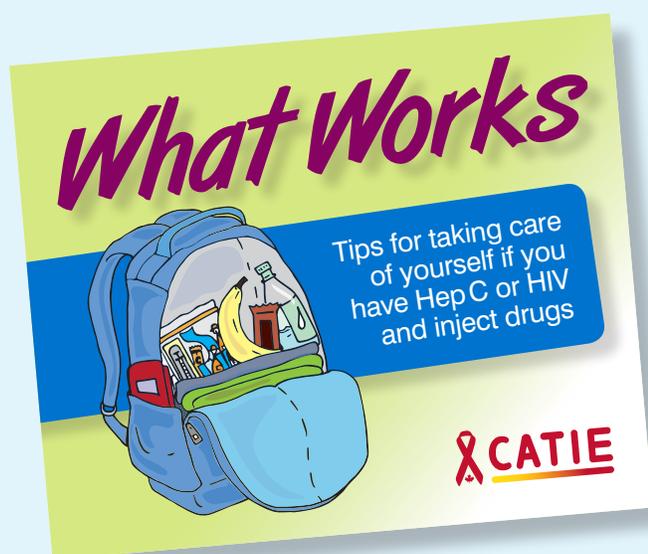
Specific online resources of interest at www.catie.ca include:

- *Hepatitis C: an in-depth guide*
- *Living with Hep C*
- *Safer injection*



Need more information in plain language?

These booklets have what you're looking for.



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Canada's source for
HIV and hepatitis C
information