



Healthy Eating for Chronic Hepatitis

What is chronic hepatitis?

Chronic hepatitis is an inflammation of the liver that lasts at least 6 months. It is caused by viruses such as hepatitis B or C, alcohol, fatty liver, autoimmune hepatitis and certain drugs, which damage liver cells.

Over time, people with chronic hepatitis may develop symptoms of the condition. Fatigue, or a feeling of tiredness that does not go away after resting, is the most common symptom of chronic hepatitis. Many people lose their appetite and get upset stomachs. People with hepatitis may also suffer from fever, diarrhea, and joint pain.

Some people with chronic hepatitis may develop cirrhosis, or scarring of the liver. Your nutrition needs may change depending on your liver function. If you have cirrhosis, speak to your health care provider or a registered dietitian about your diet.

Do I need a special diet?

No. You can meet your nutrition needs by eating a balanced and varied diet. Use *Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide* to help plan your meals. This will help you stay well.

To read more about using Canada's Food Guide, see <https://food-guide.canada.ca/en/>.

If you are not sure that your current way of eating is healthy, talk to a registered dietitian.

What if I am too tired to prepare meals?

It can be hard to eat if you are too tired to make meals or are not feeling well. Aim to keep healthy snacks and easy-to-make foods available, such as:

- Whole grain bread, naan, bagels or crackers with nut or seed butter

- Vegetables with hummus or a yogurt-based dip
- Fresh, frozen or canned fruit with yogurt or soft tofu
- Canned fish with whole grain crackers or toast
- Hot cereal with nuts and seeds or trail mix
- Reduced sodium (salt) canned bean or lentil soup with whole grain crackers

When you have the energy to cook, make more than you need. Put the leftovers in the freezer to have at another meal.

If your symptoms get worse or do not go away, talk to your health care provider.

How much protein do I need?

Most people with hepatitis need the amount of protein recommended in Canada's Food Guide. Eat foods with protein at each meal:

- 2 to 3 servings a day of Meat and Alternatives such as lean meat, poultry, fish, eggs, legumes (beans and lentils), tofu, nuts and seeds
- 2 to 3 servings a day of Milk and Alternatives such as milk, fortified soy beverage, and yogurt

What if I'm losing weight?

If you are underweight, losing weight without trying, or have a small appetite, you may not be eating enough calories to meet your needs. To help prevent weight loss, try eating small amounts of food more often and choose foods that are higher in calories.

Here are some examples of high calorie foods to include at meals and snacks:

- Nuts, seeds and their butters
- 2% or 3.25% whole milk, high fat yogurt and cheese
- Yogurt smoothies and meal replacement drinks
- Fish, poultry, tofu, legumes, lean meat and egg
- Avocado
- Olive or canola oil, and non-hydrogenated margarine (used in cooking, salad dressings, dips, or as a spread)

Limit candy, chips, donuts, pop, sweetened specialty coffee and tea, energy drinks and sports drinks. These foods give you energy but do not give you important nutrients like protein, vitamins and minerals.

What if I am overweight?

Healthy eating and being active can improve your overall health at any size. Reaching and maintaining a healthy weight can help keep your liver healthy and prevent chronic diseases like diabetes. If you are concerned about your weight and would like healthy eating or physical activity advice, call **8-1-1** and ask to speak with a registered dietitian or qualified exercise professional.

Do I need to take vitamin and mineral supplements?

Maybe. People with hepatitis may not absorb or use nutrients properly. If you are not eating well, or have vomiting or diarrhea, you might need a multivitamin/mineral supplement. Do not take high doses of any vitamin or mineral, especially iron, copper, manganese, niacin or vitamin A, unless your health care provider tells you to. High doses of some vitamins and minerals can be toxic. Talk to your health care provider before you take any supplements or herbal products.

Is it okay to drink alcohol?

No. Alcohol can damage your liver and make the problems caused by hepatitis worse. To be safe, do not drink alcohol. If you would like support to help you limit or avoid alcohol, talk to your health care provider or call **8-1-1** for more information.

What about physical activity?

Physical activity can improve appetite, decrease stress, lessen depression, and help you maintain a healthy body weight. If you have been inactive for a long time, increase your activity slowly.

Participating in physical activity is safe for most people. If you have other medical conditions or injuries, check with your health care provider or a qualified exercise professional before becoming more active.

For More Information

For information on nutrition, food choices and physical activity, call **8-1-1** to speak to a registered dietitian or qualified exercise professional.

For more information, see:

- [HealthLinkBC File #40a Hepatitis C Virus Infection](#)
- [HealthLinkBC File #40b Living Well with Hepatitis C Virus Infection](#)
- [HealthLinkBC File #40d Living Well with Hepatitis B Virus Infection](#)
- For more information on hepatitis, visit the Canadian Liver Foundation at www.liver.ca, or call toll-free 1 800 563-5483

For substance use information and support, visit Mental Health and Substance Use Supports in B.C. www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/mental-health-support-in-bc