



## Healthy Eating for Chronic Hepatitis

### What is chronic hepatitis?

Chronic hepatitis is an inflammation of the liver. Viruses such as hepatitis B or C cause the inflammation, which damages liver cells.

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.

### Do I need a special diet?

No. Like the rest of your body, your liver needs a variety of macronutrients (protein, carbohydrate and fat) and micronutrients (vitamins and minerals), to be healthy. You can meet most of your nutrition needs by eating a balanced diet following *Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide* or another healthy eating plan.

To read more about Canada's Food Guide see [www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/canada-food-guides.html](http://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/canada-food-guides.html).

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

### What if I am not feeling well?

If you are not feeling well, you may not feel like eating. If your symptoms get worse or do not go away, talk to your health care provider.

If your appetite is small, choose foods that are high in protein and/or energy (also known as calories) such as:

- nuts and seeds, or nut and seed butters;
- meat, fish, poultry, tofu and eggs; and
- whole milk (3.25% Milk Fat), yogurt and cheese.

If you are too tired to make meals, keep healthy snacks and easy-to-make foods available such as:

- bread, bagels or crackers with cheese or peanut butter;
- vegetables with hummus or a yogurt-based dip;
- fresh or canned fruit with yogurt;
- pudding with dried fruit and nuts; and
- hot cereal with nuts and seeds or trail mix.

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

### How much protein do I need?

How much protein you need depends on the stage of liver disease. A dietitian can help you learn how much protein you need.

In general, 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 meat, poultry, fish, eggs, dried beans, tofu, nuts, and seeds.
- 2 to 3 servings a day of Milk and Alternatives such as milk, soy beverage, yogurt, and cheese. (If you do not eat any of these foods, talk to a dietitian about other foods you can eat).

### What about energy?

Energy is the fuel your body needs to live and work. Your body needs a steady supply of energy to repair its cells, maintain your health and perform your daily activities. If you are maintaining your weight in a healthy range, you are getting enough energy from the foods you are eating.

## What if I'm losing weight?

If you are underweight or losing weight, you are not eating enough energy. To get more energy:

- Aim for the number of servings from each of the 4 food groups in Canada's Food Guide.
- Eat small amounts more often, even if you are not hungry. Aim to eat every 2 to 3 hours when you are awake.
- Add some high energy foods to each meal and snack. High energy foods include the following:
  - dried fruits;
  - nuts and seeds;
  - cheese and yogurt made with whole milk;
  - meat, fish and poultry;
  - avocado; and
  - olive or canola oil (used in cooking, salad dressings, etc.).

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

Instead of coffee or tea, drink milk or fortified soy beverage, milkshakes, yogurt-fruit drinks or smoothies, meal replacement drinks and 100% fruit or vegetable juice.

## What if I am overweight?

If you need to lose weight speak with your health care provider and dietitian about ways to change your diet and physical activity that will work for you. Losing weight will help to keep you and your liver healthy.

## 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 and 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 pills, 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.

## What about physical activity?

Exercise 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.

Talk with your health care provider before starting an exercise program.

## For More Information

For more information, see:

- [HealthLinkBC File #40a Hepatitis C Virus Infection](#)
- [HealthLinkBC File #40b Living Well with Hepatitis C Virus Infection](#)
- [HealthLinkBC File #68k Vitamin and Mineral Supplements for Adults](#)
- For Canada's Get Active Tip Sheets, visit [www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/health-promotion/healthy-living/physical-activity/physical-activity.html](http://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/health-promotion/healthy-living/physical-activity/physical-activity.html)
- For more information on hepatitis C, visit the Canadian Liver Foundation at [www.liver.ca](http://www.liver.ca), or call toll-free 1-800-856-7266.

For information on nutrition and food choices, call **8-1-1** to speak to a registered dietitian.

For more HealthLinkBC File topics, visit [www.HealthLinkBC.ca/healthfiles](http://www.HealthLinkBC.ca/healthfiles) or your local public health unit.

Click on [www.HealthLinkBC.ca](http://www.HealthLinkBC.ca) or call **8-1-1** for non-emergency health information and services in B.C.

For deaf and hearing-impaired assistance, call 7-1-1 in B.C.

Translation services are available in more than 130 languages on request.