

# Hepatitis B Carrier

## I am a hepatitis B carrier. What should I do?

People who are hepatitis B carriers need to be sure to keep an eye on their liver condition to determine whether their disease is progressing, whether treatment is needed, or whether liver cancer is developing. Make sure you do the following:

At least once a year, see your doctor for an check-up of your liver and, if recommended, more often. Discuss with your doctor if you are a candidate for the medication interferon alfa-2b. This medicine is offered to certain hepatitis B carriers with abnormal liver tests. Discuss with your doctor about having periodic ultrasounds and alpha-fetoprotein blood tests to make sure that there is no evidence of a developing liver cancer.

Doctors may recommend different frequencies for ultrasound and blood testing depending on a person's age, sex, ethnicity, age at which the infection was first acquired, family history, HBeAg status, and liver enzymes. Usually ultrasound and blood tests are advised every 6-12 months. Consult your doctor.

Review with your doctor ALL medications you take. Even some "over-the-counter" medications can injure your liver.

If you are pregnant, tell your doctor that you are a hepatitis B carrier. It is important that your baby be given hepatitis B immune globulin and started on hepatitis B vaccine within 12 hours of birth. Avoid alcoholic beverages. Alcohol can damage your liver.

## Will my hepatitis B ever go into "remission"?

"Remission" is not a good term to be used for an infection that doesn't let go such as hepatitis B. In some carriers, the infection may "resolve" either suddenly or as a result of antiviral therapy. This means their blood test has become HBsAg negative. Other persons may remain HBsAg positive and have no evidence of chronic liver disease ("healthy carriers"). These "healthy carriers" are considered infectious persons, although the risk of transmitting the virus may vary from carrier to carrier.

If your liver disease has progressed beyond being a "healthy carrier" here are some extra precautions that you should take.

Get your yearly influenza vaccine. Persons with severe liver disease (cirrhosis) also should receive pneumococcal vaccine. Get vaccinated against hepatitis A. Hepatitis A can hurt your liver even further. Don't eat raw oysters. Raw oysters may carry the bacteria, *Vibrio vulnificus*, which can cause primary septicemia (severe bacterial infection of the blood) in individuals with liver disease. Approximately 40% of these septicemia cases are fatal. Fatal cases of *Vibrio vulnificus* septicemia have occurred among Kansas City residents who had underlying liver disease.

## **How do I protect others from getting hepatitis B from me?**

People can get hepatitis B from you by coming into contact with your blood, or other bodily fluids such as, saliva, semen and vaginal fluids. Fortunately, the virus is not spread by sneezing or coughing, or from casual contact such as holding hands. Here are some guidelines to help you protect other people.

Tell your sex partner(s) that you are infected. Your sex partner(s) should see a doctor for hepatitis B blood testing. If the blood tests show that your partner never has had hepatitis B, he or she should be vaccinated. After the series of shots is completed, your partner needs to return to the doctor for another blood test to make sure the vaccine protected him or her. Use condoms until your partner is proven to be protected from hepatitis B.

Make sure that all household members see their doctors for hepatitis B testing and vaccination. Tell your health care providers that you are infected so that they can take the proper precautions.

- Cover all cuts and open sores with a bandage.
- Throw away used personal items such as tissues, menstrual pads, or tampons in a paper bag.
- Wash your hands well after touching your blood or body fluids.
- Clean up your own blood spills. Then reclean the area with a bleach solution (one part household bleach to 10 parts water).
- Do not share toothbrushes, razors, needles for ear or body piercing, nail files or clippers, scissors, or anything that may come into contact with your blood or body fluids.
- Do not share food that has been in your mouth and do not pre-chew food for babies.
- Do not share needles or syringes.
- Do not donate blood, plasma, body organs, tissue or sperm.

If someone is exposed to your blood - be it a family member, a friend, or even a stranger - preventive treatment is available for that person. If the exposed person receives hepatitis B immune globulin and starts the hepatitis B vaccine series within a few days, they have an excellent chance of being protected from hepatitis B.

## **Is it safe for a hepatitis B carrier to breast feed her baby?**

Yes. Studies have shown that infants who are breast fed by hepatitis B carrier mothers have no increased risk of infection.