

Hepatitis Basics



Keeping
Your Liver
Healthy

Pegylated Interferon: Managing Side Effects

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People who take pegylated interferon to treat chronic hepatitis B usually have side effects that can range from mild to moderate to severe. The physical side effects of interferon seem to get better over time, but the emotional side effects such as anger and depression may happen later and can cause a lot of problems.

The important thing to remember is that most of the side effects can be managed effectively. The first step is to report any side effects to a doctor or nurse as soon as possible. This will help to make sure that the side effects do not become worse. There are many things that a doctor or nurse can do to help with the side effects. There are also a lot of simple things that a person can do to help manage the less severe types of side effects.

One of the most important steps to take is to make sure that you have support from everyone you can – loved ones, family, friends, co-workers, and medical providers. Remember that you don't have to go it alone so enlist everyone you can to make sure your treatment journey is as effective as possible.

This fact sheet lists some simple tips to help manage some of the side effects of interferon treatment.

- Take some time off work at the beginning of treatment – you may find that just not having to face work in the beginning will make starting treatment easier. If at all possible, however, consider working as a way to help take the mind off of the treatment and the side effects
- See if a lighter work load or medical leave is an option
- Take pegylated interferon just before bedtime – you may be able to sleep through some of the side effects. It may also help to give yourself the shot on a day when you can plan to have the next day off. Check with your doctor or nurse to see if you can take an aspirin or Tylenol before you inject the interferon
- Drink plenty of fluids like water, broth, fruit drinks etc., right before the shot – drink plenty of fluids like water all during treatment – it will help with many of the side effects
- Headaches can be helped by rest, gentle massage and application of heat to the back of the neck

- Light fever can be helped by sponging the forehead with lukewarm water
- Dental care is important since interferon can cause dry mouth. Brush and floss the teeth regularly

The list below contains some helpful hints on managing some of the usual side effects of interferon.

- Flu-like symptoms
 - Talk with your doctor or nurse about over-the-counter medicines
- Skin rash where injection is given
 - Rotate the injection site; use over-the-counter skin medications
- Fatigue or feeling tired
 - Try not to overdo it – rest as much as possible
 - Try to get as much light to moderate exercise as recommended by a doctor or nurse
 - Reduce or change work schedule
- Depression is a major illness – always report any symptoms of depression, anger, anxiety or other types of mood



Pegylated Interferon – Managing Side Effects

changes to a doctor or nurse as soon as possible.

- Seek help from family, friends and support groups
 - Consider getting some professional help
 - Talk with a medical provider about antidepressants, but allow enough time for the medications to work – this can take 2 to 8 weeks to become effective
- Loss of appetite
- Treat food as medicine since eating healthy foods will help to fight HBV
 - Eat small frequent healthy meals
 - Drink clear juices, drinks and broth
 - Brush teeth often to help with any taste changes – people say that eating a small piece of dark chocolate helps to make them more hungry and removes the metallic taste in the mouth
- Weight loss
- Eat food that is high in calories and protein
 - Try products that promote weight gain such as Ensure, protein powders, and high-calorie puddings
 - Add powdered milk to ingredients when preparing meals such as casseroles, soups, potatoes, hot cereal
 - Peanut butter on crackers or bread

is nutritious and high in calories

- Melt cheese on sandwiches and burgers
- Stomach upset or vomiting
- Take over-the-counter medications as directed by a doctor or nurse
 - Avoid strong odors, spicy, deep fried and greasy food
 - Eat small healthy meals every 2-3 hours
 - Drink clear fluids
 - Eat food at room temperature – not too cold or hot
 - Eat dry crackers when first waking up and get out of bed slowly
- Diarrhea
- Diarrhea that continues for a long period can be very serious – notify your doctor or nurse if symptoms become worse, there is blood in the stools or if you lose too much weight too quickly
 - Try medicines such as Imodium and bulking agents such as Metamucil, but be sure to tell your doctor or nurse because these bulking agents can interfere with the absorption of medications
 - Stay away from spicy, sour or bitter types of food, and caffeinated beverages (soda, coffee, tea)
 - Stay away from raw fruits and vegetables
 - Try the BRAT diet – bananas, rice, applesauce, and toast to help with

the symptoms – once you start to recover slowly introduce other foods that can be difficult to digest

- Drink plenty of water
- Dry mouth and dental care – interferon can cause your body to make less saliva which could lead to dental and gum disease
- Visit the dentist before, during and after treatment
 - Drink plenty of water – stay away from soda, coffee and tea
 - Use artificial saliva
 - Brush and floss regularly
 - Use a soft toothbrush
- Rashes
- Moisturize daily with lotions and moisturizers – oatmeal based ones work well
 - Use over-the-counter hydrocortisone creams, oral antihistamines and other anti-itch medicines
 - Stay away from perfumed soaps or lotions
 - Use sunscreen when out in the sun
 - Always tell your doctor or nurse if a rash becomes worse
 - Use warm water for showers and baths – never too hot or cold
- Insomnia
- Try relaxation methods such as meditation, prayer, warm baths, and massage. A doctor or nurse



Pegylated Interferon – Managing Side Effects

might recommend taking an over-the-counter sleep medication such as Benadryl

- Don't exercise right before bedtime
- Stay away from caffeinated beverages such as coffee, soda and tea
- Make sure the bedroom is a 'stress-free zone'
- The bedroom should only be used for sex and sleeping

- Talk with your doctor or nurse about prescription sleeping medications if insomnia continues for a long period of time

It is important to remember that the side effects of interferon are different for everyone. Everyone experiences some side effects from interferon, but most people do not have the more severe type of side effects. Some people even say they feel better on interferon treatment, but this doesn't happen very often.

It seems like the people who are most proactive about managing the side effects by informing their medical providers as soon as possible and following some of these simple tips do better on treatment. For more information on managing the side effects of interferon, go to the HCV Advocate website (www.hcvadvocate.org) which has many resources to help manage the side effects including a comprehensive guide and many more specific fact sheets at www.hcvadvocate.org/hepatitis/factsheets.asp#SEM



Contact Information for Pharmaceutical Company Patient Assistance Programs

Antivirals	Phone	Website
Adefovir (Hepsera): Gilead Advancing Access	800-226-2056	www.gilead.com/us_advancing_access
Entecavir (Baraclude): Bristol-Myers Squibb Patient Assistance	800-736-0003	www.bmspaf.org
Lamivudine (Epivir HBV): GlaxoSmithKline's Bridges to Access	866-265-6491 or 866-518-4357	www.bridgestoaccess.com
Telbivudine (Tyzeka): Novartis Patient Assistance Now	800-245-5356	www.patientassistancenow.com/index.jsp
Tenofovir (Viread): Gilead Advancing Access	800-226-2056	www.gilead.com/us_advancing_access
Interferons	Phone	Website
Intron A (conventional interferon): Merck Patient Assistance Program	800-727-5400	www.merck.com/merckhelps/
Pegasys (pegylated interferon): Genentech/Roche Patient Assistance Program	877-757-6243	www.pegassist.com/
Access Solutions:		www.genentechaccesssolutions.com/portal/site/AS/

The information in this fact sheet is designed to help you understand and manage HBV and is not intended as medical advice. All persons with HBV should consult a medical practitioner for diagnosis and treatment of HBV.

For more information about the hepatitis B, visit the following websites.
Hepatitis B Foundation: www.hepb.org • HIVandHepatitis.com

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