

# Easy B's

## What Is Pegylated Interferon?



Hepatitis C Support Project  
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**Interferon works best when your ALT levels are elevated, and your viral load is low.**

One drug used to treat hepatitis B is pegylated interferon (brand name Pegasys). Interferon, administered in a weekly injection, strengthens your immune system to help it fight the hepatitis B virus (HBV).

Doctors may prescribe interferon for 48 weeks if your alanine aminotransferase (or ALT) level is above normal. This means your immune system is actively fighting the HBV infection in your liver. When your immune system attacks your HBV-infected liver cells, the damaged cells release ALT.

So, when your ALT level is elevated, doctors may prescribe interferon to give your immune system extra strength during this battle.

In clinical trials, about 27 to 32 percent of people who have the “e” antigen (HBeAg-positive hepatitis B) were able to get rid of the HbeAg and develop the “e” antibody after interferon treatment.

Studies show that people with HBeAg-negative hepatitis B, who also have elevated ALT levels and detectable viral load (HBV DNA), also benefit from interferon.



### Important things to remember:

- ◆ If you have HBeAg, interferon can lower your viral load to undetectable levels 25 percent of the time, and produce normal ALT levels in 39 percent of patients.
- ◆ If you have HBeAg-negative hepatitis B, interferon can produce undetectable viral load 63 percent of the time and normal ALT levels 38 percent of the time.
- ◆ Studies suggest that patients with HBV genotypes A and B respond better to interferon than other genotypes.
- ◆ Interferon is a very expensive drug, but it only has to be taken for 48 weeks.
- ◆ The immune system must be fighting the hepatitis B infection (indicated by high ALT levels) for interferon to work.
- ◆ In some people, interferon causes fatigue and moderate to severe depression.