

# Easy B Facts

## What Is Pegylated Interferon?

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 inter-

feron 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.

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

So, when your ALT level is elevated, doctors may prescribe interferon to help the immune system fight off HBV.

**HBeAg-positive patients:** In clinical trials, about 27 to 32% of people who have the “e” antigen (HBeAg-positive) were able to get rid of the

HBeAg and develop the “e” antibody after interferon treatment, and 39% achieved normal ALT levels.

**HBeAg-negative patients:** About 63% of these patients achieved undetectable viral load (HBV DNA) and 38% achieved normal ALT levels.

## Remember.....

- If you have HBeAg, interferon can lower your viral load to undetectable levels 25% of the time, and produce normal ALT levels in 39% of patients.
- If you have HBeAg-negative hepatitis B, interferon can produce undetectable viral load 63% of the time and normal ALT levels 38% 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.



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