

# Easy B Facts

## What Is Pegylated Interferon?

One drug used to treat chronic hepatitis B is pegylated interferon (brand name Pegasys). Pegylated 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 help the immune system fight off HBV.

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

**HBeAg-positive patients:** In a clinical trial, it was found that 27% of people who took Pegasys were able to lose the hepatitis B virus and develop antibodies. Five years after treatment ended, a total of 42% of people were able to 'clear' HBV.

**HBeAg-negative patients:** In a clinical trial, about 3% of patients lost the hepatitis B virus and developed antibodies at the end of treatment. Five years after treatment ended, a total of 13% of people were able to clear HBV.

## Remember.....

- Studies suggest that patients with HBV genotypes A and B respond better to interferon than with other genotypes.
- Interferon is an 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.
- Even after treatment ends, some people will continue to clear the hepatitis B virus from their body.



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