

Easy B Facts

What Are Antivirals?

If your liver is damaged by HBV, your doctor may treat you with an antiviral medicine to stop HBV from making more copies of itself (replicating). Unfortunately, antivirals stop HBV from replicating for only as long as you are taking them.

HBV can also become resistant – that is the virus can mutate and escape from a particular medication over time. If this happens your doctor may switch you to a different antiviral or add a second one to your treatment. There is no cure for HBV.

Below are the 5 antivirals approved to treat HBV. They are pills that are taken daily. All of them appear to be safe and cause few side effects, but some cause less viral resistance than others.

If you have never been treated, doctors suggest one of these two antivirals:

Tenofovir (Viread) blocks an enzyme that HBV needs to replicate in liver cells. It results in undetectable viral load (HBV DNA) in 76% of HBeAg-positive patients and 93% of HBeAg-negative patients. The recommended dose for chronic hepatitis B is one 300-mg tablet a day. Drug resistance after 3 years of use is 0%.

Entecavir (Baraclude) is highly effective in clearing HBV DNA (67% in HBeAg-positive and 90% in HBeAg-negative). Viral resistance is rare except in those who have already been treated with lamivudine and have developed resistance to that drug.

The following three antivirals cause higher rates of resistance and should be avoided if you are being treated for the first time:

Telbivudine (Tyzeka) has a resistance rate of 25% in HBeAg- and 11% in HBeAg + after 2 years. It is also highly effective in lowering viral load to undetectable levels (60% in HBeAg-positive and 88% in HBeAg-negative). It should not be taken with interferon because it can cause neuropathy – weakness and pain in the arms and/or legs.

Adefovir (Hepsera) works in people with HBeAg (21%) and HBeAg-negative (51%). The resistance rate is 3% after 2 years, and 29% after 5 years.

Lamivudine (Epivir-HBV) has a very high rate of drug resistance – 60 to 70% after 5 years of taking it. It is generally not given as a first treatment choice.



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