Self-Care After the Cure: Post-Hepatitis C Health and Liver Optimization (HALO)

How do I know if I’m cured?
Most people are cured of hepatitis C if their tests are negative for the virus three months after finishing treatment. For some patients with liver damage, a confirmatory test six months after treatment may be important to ensure that the cure is sustained.

Can the virus come back?
If you test negative for the virus three months after treatment, it is unlikely that the virus will come back. However, it is possible for people who have previously been cured to be reinfected with hepatitis C in the future. Follow precautions to avoid reinfection.

Do I need to schedule follow-up appointments?
After your three-month visit, your provider may ask you to schedule a six-month visit if you need monitoring because of liver damage or scarring.

Preventing Re-infection
- Never share needles
- Separate or mark your equipment
- Prepare your own drugs for injection
- Plan ahead
- Talk to your provider about support to help you quit
- Avoid exposure to blood or blood products
- Practice safe sex
- Choose tattoo and piercing providers carefully

HALO concept courtesy of Southern California GI and Liver Centers, Coronado, CA.
**HOW CAN I KEEP MY LIVER HEALTHY AFTER TREATMENT?**

**Eat a healthy diet to protect your liver.**
Follow basic good-eating practices, including prioritizing fruits and vegetables, lean meats over red meats and whole grains instead of processed ones. The liver is susceptible to fat deposits, so limit fatty foods to less than 30% of your daily calorie intake.

**Monitor and treat other health conditions.**
If you have high blood pressure, cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, kidney disease or another medical condition, continue to monitor and treat your condition appropriately. After your hepatitis C is cured, some medications may need to be swapped, or doses may need to change. For example, blood sugar levels often improve after hepatitis C is cured, and type 2 diabetes medications can be reduced. Follow up with your providers after your hepatitis C is cured.

**Continue to avoid or limit alcohol use.**
Alcohol use can damage the liver, even after your hepatitis C is cured. Drinking alcohol with a damaged liver can cause alcoholic liver disease and may contribute to other conditions, such as liver cancer.

**Exercise regularly.**
In combination with a good diet, exercise will help you maintain a healthy weight, which is important to prevent fat buildup in your liver. You should aim for 150 minutes of moderate exercise or 75 minutes of vigorous exercise each week, in addition to strength training at least two days a week.

**Continue to avoid or limit injection drug use.**
Follow proper precautions to prevent reinfection.

**WHEN CAN I START DRINKING ALCOHOL AGAIN?**

It is not recommended that you drink alcohol after hepatitis C treatment. Although you may be cured of the virus, liver damage can persist for years after treatment. There is currently not enough research to know whether drinking after treatment can further damage your liver.

If you do decide to drink after hepatitis C treatment, limit your drinking to no more than one drink a day. If you have cirrhosis or liver scarring, you should not drink at all.

**NEED HELP LIMITING YOUR ALCOHOL USE?**
- Join a support group.
- Ask your provider about addiction counseling or treatment.
- Set personal drink goals and stick to them.
- Alternate alcoholic drinks with non-alcoholic drinks.
- Plan at least two alcohol-free days per week.
- Limit drinking to celebratory or special occasions.

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“I’m only going to drink one drink per night.”
“I’d like a beer and a water, please.”
“I’m not drinking tonight.”
“I’ll have a drink on my birthday.”