

About
us

Hepatitis
information

How to get
help

Get
involved

Our
work

New
s

Workforc
e

Hepatitis information > [Hepatitis B](#)

Hepatitis B and mental health

Dr Alice Lam

People with chronic hepatitis B have higher rates of depression and anxiety than the general population.¹

Let's have a look at why this happens, and what we can do about it.

Reacting to your diagnosis

Adjustment to having a chronic (lifelong) disease may mean having to²:

- learn about hepatitis
- make lifestyle changes

Latest

Parliamentary Morning Tea: We can eliminate hepatitis C!

The Parliamentary Friends Group for Action of Blood Borne Viruses Co-Chairs, Tim Wilson, MP and Senator Louise Pratt invite you to

- decide about disclosure to others
- decide on whether to take antiviral therapy.

Research³ has found that many people worry about getting liver cancer or infecting others, and that these concerns could increase the risk of mental health problems, particularly depression. Not understanding enough about hepatitis B or having no one to confide in can also cause social isolation and affect mental health⁴.

Hepatitis B treatment

There is no cure yet for chronic hepatitis B, but there are medications which can control the virus and reduce the risk of serious complications from the condition. However, like all medications, the treatment for hepatitis B can cause side-effects for some people, including affecting your mental health. This is something you should discuss with your doctor, as well as whether you'd like any additional support during your treatment.

There are two main options for treatment⁵. Usually, the preferred option is nucleoside analogues (NAs), such as tenofovir and entecavir. These have fewer side effects than interferon, but often need to be taken for a long time, or even for life. Pegylated interferon (PEG-IFN) is an alternative and is usually given over 48 weeks.

Researchers⁶ reviewed studies of people on interferon, and found:

- significant depression occurred in 5% to 15% of people, with 21% to 58% experiencing milder symptoms
- anxiety was found in 1.4% to 3.3% of people.

a Parliamentary Morning Tea on Thursday 12 November.

Renewed calls for Needle & Syringe Programs in prisons ahead of International Drug Users Day

The Australian Injecting and Illicit Drug Users League (AIVL) and Hepatitis Australia are highlighting international calls for Needle and Syringe Programs (NSPs) in prisons, along with a greater focus on harm reduction initiatives, ahead of International Drug Users Day on 1 November.

Investment in hepatitis research needs to be accompanied by National Strategy implementation funding

6 October 2020 - Hepatitis Australia welcomes the Australian Government's commitment to diverse hepatitis research, however we remain concerned that the 2019 Health Budget funding for hepatitis

It is also possible that a history of depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), combined with interferon may cause worsening symptoms, or relapse².

Now let's look at how to get help.

Learn and connect

Learning about hepatitis B is a good way of combatting misconceptions. Great resources include the [Hepatitis Australia website](#) and the National Hepatitis Infoline (1800 437 222), which directs you to the community-based hepatitis organisation in your state or territory who provide friendly and confidential help.

In addition you can look at the [Hep B Help](#) website which has links to hepatitis B organisations plus multilingual factsheets, audio and video resources too.

You could also contact the hepatitis organisation in your [state or territory](#) and perhaps link up with people who have similar experiences. Alternatively, you could join an online forum like [Hep Forums](#).

Talk to your partner, friends and family. By sharing your knowledge, you can reduce stigma - which might otherwise isolate you or interfere with you receiving treatment - while getting the support you need. You can read these [tips on telling others you have hepatitis](#).

Get healthy

Eat a healthy, balanced diet and maintain a healthy weight. Avoid alcohol and smoking. You should talk to your doctor before using any non-

commitments is yet to hit the ground.

Related

Hepatitis B Guide

Testing, treatment and staying healthy. This guide is to help you understand the process from being tested for hepatitis B (often called hep B) to living well with chronic (life-long) hep B.

What is hepatitis B?

Basic information about hepatitis B transmission and how it affects people.

Hepatitis B vaccination

Hepatitis B can be prevented with a safe and effective vaccine.

Most read

prescription drugs or supplements.

Try to keep to a regular sleep pattern and regular exercise.

For general support for mental health you can check out [Head To Health](#) as well as [Lifeline](#) and [Beyond Blue](#). If you need more support, don't forget you can speak with your GP, specialist or ask for a referral to a psychologist or psychiatrist.

Medications and talking therapy

When mental health issues arise, many people find it helps see a psychologist for one-to-one, confidential talking therapy. Sessions usually include learning about the mental health condition, why it has happened and why it has persisted. The psychologist can work with you to use tools like relaxation, mindfulness and cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) as a way of coping with difficult emotions^{7,8}.

It is also thought that antidepressants and anti-anxiety medications can work well for interferon-related depression and anxiety^{9,10}

Pre-existing psychiatric medication may need to be changed or adjusted during antiviral treatment, for example to one less toxic to the liver.

Psychiatric medications and support might need to continue for at least 6 to 12 weeks after finishing antiviral treatment¹⁰.

For people at higher risk for depression, such as those with a history of depression or alcohol overuse, pre-emptive treatment with antidepressants can be started before beginning antiviral therapy¹⁰.

Coronavirus COVID-19 factsheet for people with hepatitis B and hepatitis C

Hepatitis Australia has put together a brief factsheet with information about the coronavirus COVID-19 for people living with hepatitis B and hepatitis C.

Hepatitis A

Basic information about hepatitis A in Australia

COVID-19

Information on the coronavirus COVID-19 for people affected by hepatitis B or hepatitis C.

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