

If you use herbs and other supplements, tell your doctor, even if you think she might disapprove. Although they may seem appealing, a number of herbs can cause harm. Herbs can cause hepatotoxicity (poisoning of the liver), so people with HCV should avoid herbs or use them cautiously with the advice of an expert. Drugs, herbs, and supplements can interact with each other, and may affect various health conditions. People with decompensated cirrhosis should never use herbs.

Patients on HCV treatment need to be extra cautious before taking any supplements. Do not take St. John's wort or milk thistle unless your doctor verifies it is OK to take with the HCV medication prescribed for you. Since we don't know if other supplements interfere with HCV medications, talk to your medical provider before taking any supplements.

If you do use dietary supplements, become informed and be sure your information is current. Before you take an herb or supplement, find out if it is compatible with other drugs or supplements you are taking. Verify that the supplement is not contraindicated for any other condition you may have. Apply the same caution and commonsense approach to supplements that you would to any drug.

Never take high doses of vitamins, minerals, or other supplements unless you do so under medical care and it has been cleared by the specialist who is following your liver disease.

Multivitamins and minerals – Choose a no or low iron version unless your doctor wants you to have the additional iron. Do not take extra just because you think you need it. More is not better. Try to get vitamin A from food or beta-carotene supplements; limit retinol intake to 700mcg or 2,333 IU daily. (Men's intake is slightly higher.) The best way to take vitamins and minerals is by eating a nutritional diet.

Calcium – It will not damage your liver if you take the recommended daily allowance of calcium. Talk to your doctor about the correct dose for your needs.

Black Cohosh – This herb has been approved by Germany's prestigious Commission E for premenstrual complaints, painful periods, and management of menopause symptoms. In Australia, there were 3 reports of severe hepatitis linked to black cohosh use. Two of these cases resulted in liver failure requiring transplant surgery. Since these cases involved the use of herbal blends mixed with other ingredients besides cohosh, experts do not all agree about this risk. Gastric discomfort is the most common side effect. Black cohosh should not be taken by pregnant or lactating women. Safety is unknown for women with endometriosis, breast or uterine cancer. Black cohosh may interact with a number of other drugs, herbs and dietary supplements.

For more information about herbs and supplements, look under "Hepatitis C and Complementary and Alternative Medicine" in the Factsheet section at www.hcvadvocate.org.

CONCLUSION

You are not alone. There are millions of women in the world living with hepatitis C. You have already begun the process of learning how to live with HCV by gathering information. Add in good medical care, support and a healthy lifestyle, and you have a formula that may keep you healthy for years to come.





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