

- You had sex without a condom with an infected person (a less common cause).
- You had a blood transfusion several years ago (blood is now screened for HCV).

Many people do not know how they were exposed to HCV.

How HCV Spreads

If the stool moves through the colon more slowly than normal, it stays in the colon too long. Because water is constantly being removed, the stool becomes dry and hard. This causes constipation: bowel movements that are less frequent than usual and very difficult or painful.

Hepatitis C Develops Slowly

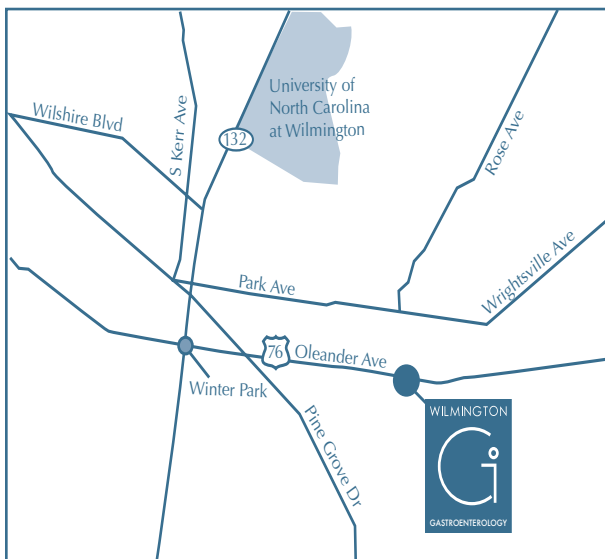
Over time, HCV causes the disease hepatitis C. This disease slowly damages the liver. A healthy liver makes chemicals used throughout the body and removes toxins from the blood. When you have hepatitis C, the liver becomes inflamed and scarred. Chronic liver problems such as cirrhosis and cancer may develop in 10-30 years.

Follow Up Regularly

Hepatitis C can get worse and damage your liver without your knowing it. Stay in regular contact with your doctor and healthcare team. They can watch your condition and tell you about any new research and types of treatment for hepatitis C.

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Hepatitis C

*Living with a
 Silent, Chronic Disease*



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Is Hepatitis C Like Other Kinds of Hepatitis?

Hepatitis means inflammation of the liver. There are many kinds of hepatitis. Some can spread. Others do not. Hepatitis C does spread. It can lead to lifelong liver disease. This includes chronic hepatitis, cirrhosis, liver failure, liver cancer, and problems with the body's defenses (immune system).

Symptoms of Hepatitis C

Most people notice no problems until they develop liver diseases years later. Symptoms include the following:

- Flu like problems (fatigue, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, and sore muscles and joints)
- Tenderness in the upper right abdomen
- Jaundice (yellowish skin), swelling in the abdomen, itching and dark urine



Testing Your Liver

It's likely that hepatitis C was found when routine liver tests were done on your blood or after you donated blood. Once hepatitis C is discovered, a medical evaluation helps assess if you have liver disease. You may also have a small sample (biopsy) taken from the liver to see if medications may help.

Treating Hepatitis C

Hepatitis C is difficult to treat. But you can take steps to keep your body strong to and to relieve some symptoms.

Avoid stressing the liver. Do not use anything that stresses the liver. This includes alcohol and any unnecessary medications - even over-the-counter medications such as acetaminophen.

Eat a balanced diet. A diet low in fat, high in fiber, and full of fresh fruits and vegetables helps you maintain your health.

Take medication. To help improve liver function, you may be given injections of a medication called alpha interferon 3 times a week for 6 to 12 months. In most cases, you will also be given ribavirin (an antiviral medication) to take orally twice a day. Your doctor can talk to you about the possible side effects of therapy with these medications.



Only You Can Prevent the Spread

No vaccine or medication can prevent the spread of HCV and hepatitis C. It's up to you to keep others safe.

Do:

- Cover all skin breaks and sores yourself. If you should need help, the person treating you should wear latex gloves.
- Use condoms during sex, especially with a new partner.

Don't:

- Don't donate blood, plasma, body organs, other body tissue, or sperm.
- Don't share needles.
- Don't share razors, toothbrushes, manicure tools, or other personal items.

A Dangerous Virus

Hepatitis C is caused by a virus, just as the flu and many colds are caused by viruses. But unlike colds and flu, the hepatitis C virus (HCV) is much more dangerous and hard to treat.

How HCV Spreads

HCV spreads through exposure to an infected person's blood. This is most likely to occur if:

- You used an infected needles (IV drug needles, tattoos, acupuncture needles, and body piercing).
- You had a needlestick injury in the hospital.
- You shared personal care items such as razors.