Hep C
Health Promotion
Health Promotion Modules

The Hep C Community Health Navigation Health Promotion Modules guide Navigators in: providing health promotion, assessing patient need for supportive services and referrals, developing a patient navigation care plan, completing required forms, and promoting behavior change.

### HEALTH PROMOTION MODULES

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### I. Hep C Basics

| What is Hepatitis C?                                                                     | During Navigation assessment phase. Reinforce throughout pre-treatment phase as needed. |
| How do people get Hep C?                                                                 |                                                                              |
| What type of Hep C do you have?                                                         |                                                                              |
| How do you know if you have liver damage?                                               |                                                                              |
| Treatment: How is Hep C treated?                                                        |                                                                              |

### II. Getting Ready for Hep C Care

| Mental health: Improving mental wellness                                                | During the Navigation assessment phase.                                      |
| Alcohol: Does drinking alcohol damage the liver?                                        |                                                                              |
| Form: Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT)                                 |                                                                              |
| Drug use: Reducing the harm of drug use                                                  |                                                                              |
| Form: Drug Abuse Screening Test (DAST)                                                   |                                                                              |
| Lifestyle changes: Protect your liver                                                   |                                                                              |
| Referrals: Getting support                                                               |                                                                              |

### III. Getting Ready for Treatment

| Form: Treatment Planning Form                                                            |                                                                              |

### IV. After Treatment

| Staying healthy and avoiding Hep C reinfection                                          | During and after treatment.                                                 |

### WHAT’S IN EACH MODULE?

**ASSESS NEED** for health promotion. Ask questions to assess what your patient already knows or does not know. Based on their responses, tailor the talking points and action plan.

**TELL PATIENTS** key messages. After sharing these messages, review information, make plan, or discuss decisions.

**REVIEW INFO** and use the questions in this section to make sure the patient understands the information provided.

**MAKE A PLAN** with the patient based on the information they received, and record action items on the Care Plan at the end of this guide.

**DISCUSS** with the patient the pros and cons of making decisions as these may require further thought.
HEP C BASICS: KEY MESSAGES

The Navigator can deliver the following key messages to cover all basics for hepatitis C (Hep C). The content can be delivered in a manner that is tailored to the patient’s needs and health literacy. The following pages provide additional guidance for assessing knowledge gaps and providing information.

WHAT IS HEP C?
1. Hep C is a liver infection caused by a virus.
2. Hep C is spread through infected blood.
3. Hep C can cause serious health problems like liver disease and cancer.
4. Get tested to know if you have Hep C. Hep C testing is a two-step process:
   • Hep C antibody test
   • Hep C RNA (viral or confirmatory) test
Sometimes, these two tests are given together at the same time.
5. Avoid alcohol if you have Hep C. Alcohol can speed up liver damage.

GET HEP C CURED
6. Hep C treatment is now usually one pill, taken daily for a few months, with few side effects.
7. Most people with Hep C can be cured.
8. Even if you were cured, you can get re-infected with Hep C.

PREVENT HEP C
9. Protect yourself from blood exposure to prevent Hep C infection or reinfection.
10. If you use drugs, only use new supplies every time you inject, smoke or snort.
11. Always practice safer sex.
WHAT IS HEPATITIS C?

1. ASSESS NEED
Sample question: “What would you like to know about Hep C?”

2. TELL PATIENTS
1. Hepatitis C (Hep C) is caused by a virus that infects the liver.
   • Hepatitis means inflammation of the liver.
   • Your liver keeps you healthy in many ways. It removes toxins from your blood and transforms nutrients from food into energy
   • There are different causes of hepatitis. Hepatitis can be caused by excessive alcohol use, fatty liver, and viruses such as hepatitis A, B or C.

2. Hep C virus is transmitted (passed from one person to another) through blood.

3. Hep C can lead to serious health problems, including liver damage, liver failure, cancer, and death.

4. Many people with Hep C do not have symptoms and do not know they are infected.
   • Symptoms of Hep C can take up to 30 years to develop.
   • When symptoms do appear, they are often a sign of advanced liver disease.

5. Hep C can be cured.
   • If you are cured of Hep C, your liver health will likely improve.

3. REVIEW INFO
Sample question:
   • “Have you had symptoms of hepatitis?”
   • “Can Hep C be cured?”
   • “How would you explain Hep C to a friend or family member?”
HOW DO PEOPLE GET HEP C?

1. ASSESS NEED
Sample question: “Do you know how Hep C is transmitted?”

2. TELL PATIENTS
1. Hep C is transmitted (passed along from one person to another) through blood.
   - It only takes a tiny amount of blood to spread Hep C.

2. The most common way to transmit Hep C is through sharing drug use equipment.
   - This may have happened a long time ago.
   - If you use drugs, only use all new or sterile drug use equipment.
   - This includes: needles, syringes, razors, cutters, ties, cookers, cups, rinse water, spoons, cotton, filters, pipes, straws, or rolled money.
   - The Hep C virus is also transmitted by sharing needles or injection equipment (for blood transfusions, non-sterile injections, insulin, drug use, steroids, tattooing or acupuncture).

3. Hep C is rarely transmitted through sex.
   - Risk for sexual transmission is higher when blood is present, in men who have sex with men, in people with HIV or in people with multiple sex partners.

4. Hep C can be transmitted by sharing things that touched your blood.
   - This includes toothbrushes, razors, nail clippers, piercing or tattoo equipment.

5. Hep C can spread from mother to baby during pregnancy or childbirth.
   If you’re pregnant, tell your doctor that you have Hep C.

3. MAKE A PLAN
Sample question: “What can you do to prevent passing Hep C along to others?”
HEP C BASICS:
WHAT TYPE OF HEP C DO YOU HAVE?

1. ASSESS NEED
Sample question: “When were you diagnosed with Hep C?”

2. TELL PATIENTS
Hep C testing is usually a two-step process.

1. The first test is the Hep C antibody test.
   • This test shows if you have ever had the Hep C virus.
   • Even if you “cleared” or were cured of Hep C, you will always have a positive Hep C antibody test.

2. The second test is the Hep C RNA (viral load) test.
   • This shows if you have the Hep C infection now.
   • If this test is positive, it means you have Hep C.
   • This test also shows how much Hep C virus is in your blood.
You need another blood test to find out what type of Hep C you have.

3. The Hep C genotype test is a third type of test that tells you what type of Hep C virus you have.
   • There are at least six types (genotypes) of Hep C.
   • Knowing the type you have helps your doctor decide what treatment is best for you.
Everyone with Hep C should also be tested for HIV and hepatitis B.

3. REVIEW INFO
Sample question:
   • “What tests have you had?”
   • “What tests do you still need?”
HEP C BASICS:
HOW DO YOU KNOW IF YOU HAVE LIVER DAMAGE?

1. ASSESS NEED
Sample question: “Have you had symptoms of liver damage?”

2. TELL PATIENTS
1. Symptoms and signs of Hep C can include: fever, fatigue, loss of appetite, nausea and vomiting, abdominal pain, dark urine, grey-colored stools, joint pain, jaundice.

2. Most of these symptoms are due to liver inflammation or damage.

3. Chronic Hep C can damage the liver.
   - It can cause inflammation of the liver, which can lead to scarring of the liver tissue, moderate liver damage (fibrosis), and severe liver damage (cirrhosis).
   - People with cirrhosis are at high risk for liver failure, liver cancer, and even death.
   - Liver damage often happens over a period of 20 to 30 years.

4. A medical evaluation will tell you if you have liver damage. You make take some of these tests:
   - **Fibrosis tests (e.g. Fibrosure)**: Blood tests that look for liver damage.
   - **Liver ultrasound/Fibroscan**: Non-invasive imaging tests that provide a picture of the shape, size, and/or stiffness of the liver.
   - **Liver biopsy**: Removal of a small piece of liver tissue with a needle. The tissue is checked under a microscope for damage or disease. This test is rarely needed.
   - **Liver cancer screening tests**: Blood tests or ultrasound recommended for people with cirrhosis to get every six months.

3. REVIEW INFO
Sample questions:
   - “Do you have any symptoms of Hep C that concern you?”
   - “Have you had evaluation to check if you have liver damage?”
   - “What is your stage of liver damage?”
HEP C BASICS:
HOW IS HEP C TREATED?

1. ASSESS NEED
Sample questions:
• “Have you ever been treated for Hep C before?”
• “If yes, what year? Were you cured, not cured, or infected again?”
• “What have you heard about Hep C treatment?”

2. TELL PATIENTS
1. Treatment is now easier, shorter, and much more likely to cure Hep C than in the past.
   - Most people can be cured by taking antiviral medication for 12 weeks, or sometimes less.
   - Treatment is now almost always pills, once a day, with few side effects.
   - Sustained virologic response (SVR) is the term for cure in Hep C. SVR is achieved when no virus is found in the blood at 12 or 24 weeks after finishing treatment.

2. Your doctor will work with you to choose the best medication for you.
   - This depends on what type (genotype) of Hep C you have, if you’ve ever been treated for Hep C before, and how much liver damage you have.

3. Get treated for Hep C to:
   1. Remove the virus from your body
   2. Slow down, stop, or reverse liver damage
   3. Keep you from getting sicker
   4. Keep you from needing a liver transplant
   5. Keep you from developing cirrhosis or liver cancer

4. If you are cured, you will no longer be at risk of passing Hep C along to others.

3. DISCUSS
Sample questions:
• “Would you like to get treated for Hep C?”
• "Why or why not?"
GETTING READY FOR HEP C CARE: IMPROVING MENTAL WELLNESS

1. TELL PATIENTS

1. Living with Hep C can be stressful. It is common to experience:
   - Extreme fatigue
   - Sleep problems
   - Aches and pains
   - Stomach problems
   - Fears related to health
   - Social isolation
   - Depression
   - Anxiety

2. Any of the above issues can affect your mental health, which includes:
   - Thoughts, feelings, emotions, and energy

3. People with unstable mental health often face health care barriers.
   - Managing your mental health can help you get through medical care and treatment.

2. ASSESS NEED AND DISCUSS

Sample questions:
   - “Have you ever been diagnosed with a mental health issue?”
   - “Are you taking any psychiatric medications?”
   - “Do you currently see a therapist or counselor?”
   - “Do you have any mental health concerns you would like help with?”

3. MAKE A PLAN

If the patient expresses concerns, but is not receiving services, say:

It may be helpful to speak with a professional if you notice that mental health issues are getting in the way of your day-to-day activities or goals.
   - This includes working, eating, sleeping, or relationships.

Record referrals on the Care Plan.
GETTING READY FOR HEP C CARE:
DOES DRINKING ALCOHOL DAMAGE THE LIVER?

1. ASSESS NEED
Use the “Alcohol Screening and Counseling for Hepatitis Patients” guide to assess current alcohol use and identify need for alcohol counseling. This guide includes the:
1. Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT)
2. Substance Abuse Brief Intervention and Referral for Treatment (SBIRT)

2. TELL PATIENTS
1. Alcohol is very hard on the liver.
   • Alcohol can damage or kill liver cells.
   • Alcohol greatly increases risk for developing cirrhosis and liver cancer if you have Hep C.

2. If you have Hep C it is safest not to drink any alcohol.
   • This includes beer, wine, whiskey, and all other liquors.

3. People who use alcohol often face Hep C treatment barriers.
   • Cutting down or stopping drinking can help you get ready for treatment.

4. If you cannot stop drinking completely, cutting down can help.
   • The less you drink the better.

3. MAKE A PLAN
For patients that drink, provide alcohol counseling as indicated in “Alcohol Screening and Counseling for Hepatitis Patients” and develop an action plan for cutting down on alcohol.
GETTING READY FOR HEP C CARE:
REDUCING THE HARM OF DRUG USE

1. ASSESS NEED

Use the Drug Abuse Screening Test (DAST) to assess current drug use and identify the patient’s need for harm reduction services or substance abuse treatment. Ask specifically about injection drug use when using the DAST.

2. TELL PATIENTS

1. **Sharing drug use equipment** is the most common way that Hep C is passed from one person to another.
   - All equipment used for injecting drugs can pass along Hep C. This includes: needles, syringes, razors, cutters, ties, cookers, cups, rinse water, spoons, cotton, and filters.
   - Pipes, straws, rolled money or other snorting equipment can also pass along Hep C.

2. People who use drugs often **face Hep C treatment barriers**.
   - Cutting down or stopping drug use can help you get ready to start treatment.

3. Each drug has different health risks. Some drugs are very hard on the liver.

3. DISCUSS & MAKE A PLAN

1. Use page 8 of this Health Promotion Guide (“Guide for Improving Readiness to Change”) to guide a conversation that can help motivate patients to reduce or stop drug use.

2. Record goals and action items on the *Care Plan*.
GETTING READY FOR HEP C CARE: PROTECT YOUR LIVER

1. ASSESS NEED
Sample question: “How do you keep your liver healthy?”

2. TELL PATIENTS
1. Tell all of your doctors that you have Hep C.
   - Your doctors can help you avoid medications that may harm your liver.

2. Ask your doctor before taking over-the-counter medications, natural or herbal medicines, vitamins, or supplements.
   - Some over-the-counter medications such as acetaminophen (Tylenol), vitamins, supplements (such as iron), or “natural” drugs can be dangerous to your liver.
   - No “natural medication” is known to work for treating Hep C.

3. Eat a healthy diet, exercise, and maintain a healthy body weight.
   - Being overweight and/or eating an unhealthy diet can lead to fat build up in the liver (“fatty liver”) and can cause liver damage.
   - Exercise at least two to three times a week for 30 minutes each time.
   - Avoid sugary food and drinks. Eat more fruits, vegetables, and high-fiber foods.

4. Smoking tobacco can damage the liver.

5. Other health conditions can worsen liver damage.
   - These conditions include HIV, Hep B, diabetes, obesity, and metabolic syndrome.
   - Some conditions, like heart disease, can make Hep C treatment more difficult.
   - It’s important to manage these conditions to improve overall health and reduce stress to the liver.

3. MAKE A PLAN
Sample question: “Which of the tips above would help you keep your liver healthy?”
Complete the “Health Goals” section of the Care Plan.
GETTING READY FOR HEP C CARE:
GETTING SUPPORT

1. TELL PATIENTS
Sample opening statement: “Health insurance, financial issues, housing, legal issues, and relationships with family and friends can all affect your health.”

2. ASSESS NEED & DISCUSS

1. Health insurance can help cover your Hep C care and treatment.
   - Some people without insurance may get free medications through patient assistance programs.
   - Ask patients, “Do you have health insurance?”

2. If you are having trouble making ends meet, it can be difficult to focus on your health.
   - “In the last year, have you had trouble paying for food, housing, medications, heat or other basic needs?”

3. Not having a stable place to live is stressful and can make it hard to keep taking your meds or take care of your health.
   - “In the last year, where have you lived?”
   - “Where are you living now? How long will you live there?”

4. Dealing with legal issues can be stressful and can take a lot of time.
   - “Were you incarcerated in the last year?”
   - “Were you incarcerated ever?”
   - “Do you have any legal issues now?”

5. Feeling alone can make it hard to deal with your health.
   - “Do you have family or friends you can talk to about your health?”
   - “Would you be interested in going to a Hep C support group?”

3. MAKE A PLAN
Provide a list of suggested referrals to review with patient.
Ask if he or she accepts the referrals:
   - If yes, document on Care Plan and review with patient.
   - If no, ask patient if you can discuss again in the future.
GETTING READY FOR TREATMENT: 
ARE YOU READY TO START TREATMENT?

1. ASSESS NEED
If possible, this discussion should take place with the patient’s doctor present.

Sample question: “You are recommended to start treatment. On a scale of 1 to 10, how ready are you to start?”

2. TELL PATIENT
1. Hep C can be cured by taking antiviral medication.
   • If you are cured, you are less likely to develop liver disease and cancer, and you will be healthier overall.

2. Take your meds at the same time every single day.
   • If you miss doses, the treatment is less likely to work and resistance to the medication can develop.
   • Planning ahead helps prepare for unexpected situations and ensure that you take your meds each day.

3. If you have side effects, contact your doctor or navigator right away.
   • Don’t stop taking your medications without talking to your doctor first.

3. DISCUSS & MAKE A PLAN
Review and complete Treatment Planning Form with patient. Make sure that patients understand their prescribed regimen and plan strategies for preventing missed doses.

4. REVIEW INFO
1. Ask patient to describe their treatment regimen in full.
2. Ask patient, on a scale of 1-10, how confident he or she is to take all medications as prescribed for the duration of treatment.

nastad.org/hepatitis-navigation-toolkit
AFTER TREATMENT:
STAYING HEALTHY AND AVOIDING HEP C

1. ASSESS NEED
Sample question: “Can you get Hep C again, after you have been cured?”

2. TELL PATIENT
1. An “undetectable” Hep C viral load means there is no Hep C virus found in your blood.
   • Sustained virologic response (SVR) is the term used for cure in Hep C. If your viral load remains undetectable 12 or 24 weeks after treatment, you are cured.

2. You can always get infected with Hep C again, even if you are cured.
   • There is no Hep C vaccine. There is no immunity to Hep C.
   • You can get re-infected from your own old blood from before you were cured. Throw away any razors, clippers, toothbrushes, washcloths or anything that may have your old blood on it.
   • If you use drugs, only use new or sterile drug use equipment. Medications such as methadone and buprenorphine can help you avoid many health risks.
   • Avoid other people’s blood. Do not share personal care items, such as toothbrushes, razors, needles, nail files/clippers/scissors, or washcloths.

3. Keeping seeing your doctor to keep track of your health.

4. If you have cirrhosis, you need liver cancer screening every six months.

For patients for whom Hep C treatment was not effective, reassure patient that new Hep C medications may be available in the future.

3. MAKE A PLAN
1. Review the medical follow up visit plan recommended by the doctor.
2. Review the “Getting Ready for Hep C Care: Protect Your Liver” section on page 21.

4. REVIEW INFO
Sample question: “What will you do to stay healthy and avoid Hep C after treatment?”