



Canada's source for  
HIV and hepatitis C  
information

La source canadienne  
de renseignements sur  
le VIH et l'hépatite C

From *Hepatitis C: An In-Depth Guide*

## **Nutrition on a budget**

It is important that people living with hepatitis C eat a diet with adequate nutrients, including protein sources and vitamins and minerals from fruit and vegetables. This can be tough for people who have limited financial resources and often have to choose between food and shelter.

Key points of advice:

- Balance food intake with physical activity to maintain a healthy weight
- Avoid processed or fast food, which is high in fat and sugar

### **Some low-cost food choices:**

#### **Protein**

Protein often comes from meat, which can be expensive. Choose alternate sources such as beans, lentils, peas or tofu. Canned tuna or salmon is also good and inexpensive (and low in fat). Protein can also be found in nuts, cheese, and eggs. If hunting or fishing is part of the culture or an activity done in the area, this can be a good way to get protein into your diet.

#### **Carbohydrates**

Pasta and rice are inexpensive and easy to prepare. When buying pasta, choose whole grain pasta or pasta high in fibre. Avoid white bread, donuts, cupcakes, cake and cookies. Look for whole grain breads and other baked goods on sale; buy “day old” bakery items and store them in the freezer until needed.

#### **Fruits and vegetables**

Canned or frozen fruits and vegetables are relatively inexpensive and store better than fresh. Different fruits and vegetables have different growing schedules—when a product is in season it is often cheaper and more widely available (for example, apples in the fall, berries in early summer), so take advantage of these deals. Following the natural growing schedule will also add variety to the diet.

#### **Dairy**

Powdered milk is less expensive than fresh milk and does not spoil. Orange juice with added calcium can be an alternative source of calcium for people who are lactose intolerant. Some vegetables like broccoli and kale also contain calcium.

#### **Water**

Try to drink lots of water every day. Water helps the body process nutrients and makes it easier for the liver to get rid of waste. Fruit juice is OK when it is hard to get clean drinking water. Alcohol, coffee and other drinks with caffeine (such as soda pop) don't count because they actually make the body lose water.

### **Community food programs**

For people who run into trouble affording food, many communities have food bank programs. Different food banks have different policies about accessing their services. Other possible food access programs include drop-ins, community kitchens and meal programs.

Choosing a grocery store is important: convenience stores or small 24-hour grocery shops tend to be more expensive than discount grocery stores or supermarkets. There's a price attached to the convenience of 24-hour availability.

When possible, buying in bulk can save money. For example, breakfast cereals and oatmeal are much less expensive in bulk than in individual serving packets. This also applies to other staple items such as flour, sugar, dried fruits and nuts.

There are programs where local farmers provide people with fresh fruit and vegetables every two to four weeks for a small fee. These can be cheaper than going out to buy the vegetables individually.

## **Vitamins and supplements**

Consulting a doctor before taking vitamin supplements will limit the potential for liver damage. A multivitamin-mineral supplement may be beneficial, particularly if the person eats irregularly or is not able to eat well. A physician can determine whether this is advisable.

## **No stove or fridge?**

There are lots of foods that are healthy, keep for a while and don't require much cooking, like bread or bagels, peanut butter or nuts, granola bars, powdered milk, canned tuna or salmon, canned beans, raisins, bananas and apples. Try to keep some of these foods on hand.

## **Nutrition tips for severe liver damage (cirrhosis)**

- Get advice from a doctor or dietitian (a healthcare professional who specializes in nutrition).
- Eat smaller meals every few hours. This may be easier to digest and will help keep energy levels up.
- Potentially limit intake of salt, if swelling of the stomach area (ascites) or legs (edema) is present.
- A multivitamin-mineral supplement is an option to discuss with a doctor. A version without iron may be needed.
- Try extra-strength liquid nutrition supplements, available from a pharmacy. Some examples are: Boost Plus Calories, Ensure Plus and Resource Plus.

## **Eating well when using drugs**

Using drugs can suppress appetite or make it easy to forget to eat. Here are some things to do to get some nutrition while using and when taking a break.

- Drink high calorie meal replacement drinks, milkshakes, chocolate milk, fortified malted drinks or soymilk.
- Take a daily multivitamin-mineral supplement.
- Eat as well as possible when not high.
- Try to buy some groceries that last a long time. Stock up on peanut butter, oatmeal, powdered milk and canned stews and soups before spending money on drugs.

## **Detoxing or recovering from drug use?**

Nutrition may be different while detoxing or recovering from drug use. Check out [Nutrition and recovery](#) for tips.

## **Finding a Dietitian**

Registered dietitians have training in the science of food and nutrition. They can give specific advice about nutrition and Hep C. For more information on how to find a dietitian in your province or territory, see the [Dietitians of Canada Website](#).

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## Produced By:



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information

555 Richmond Street West, Suite 505, Box 1104  
Toronto, Ontario M5V 3B1 Canada  
Phone: 416.203.7122  
Toll-free: 1.800.263.1638  
Fax: 416.203.8284  
www.catie.ca  
Charitable registration number: 13225 8740 RR

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