

Hepatitis C: response to treatment



FACTSHEET 27

Hepatitis Council of Qld



You will need to have a number of tests during treatment to measure your response. They are all **important indicators of how well treatment is working for you in clearing the virus**

What is a response?

The term 'response' generally relates to what happens to the hepatitis C virus in your blood.

- **A lot of technical medical language is often used when talking about response;**
- **It is important that you understand the general meaning of such medical language, so that you can monitor your own health and participate fully in making treatment decisions.**

How is response tested for?

Regular blood tests are required during and after treatment. These tests are needed to monitor your liver function and response to treatment.

- **ALT blood tests:** this is a liver function test that measures the level of an enzyme called *alanine aminotransferase* in your blood. Low or normal enzyme levels suggest there is no ongoing damage to the liver;

- **PCR test:** this is a blood test that detects genetic material (RNA) of the hepatitis C virus. A negative PCR test shows that the virus has been reduced to below detectable levels in your blood, or has cleared.

What are the main ways response is measured?

There are three main *categories* of response:

- **Virological:** this relates to the amount of virus in your blood, and is usually measured by a PCR test;
- **Biochemical:** this relates to 'markers' in your blood, such as liver enzymes, and is usually measured in liver function tests;
- **Histological:** this relates to the degree of liver cell damage, and involves a liver biopsy.

As well as different categories of response, there are also different *types*:

- **Initial response** (early response): this means you have had a positive response to treatment (for example, your viral load or ALTs might have decreased);
- **Partial response:** this means you have had a decrease in viral load and/or ALT levels, but they are still detectable in your blood or are above normal;
- **Non-response:** this means the virus has not responded to treatment, and it is likely you will stop treatment before the end of



The ABC of Hepatitis Training Package is an initiative of Queensland Health through funding provided by the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing under the National Hepatitis C Prevention and Education Initiative

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the full course;

- **Sustained virological response (SVR):** treatment has been successful and you have cleared hepatitis C. A sustained response is where no presence of the virus can be detected for up to 6 months after treatment;
- **Relapse:** despite having undetectable virus levels during treatment, the virus has returned once treatment has stopped.

Is it possible to get a 'cure'?

- When people talk about a cure, they mean there is no virus detectable in your blood;
- This doesn't take into account the fact that the virus may be present in your blood, but is at such low levels that it isn't doing any active damage to your liver;
- It also doesn't take into account the other important benefits that come with treatment, even if the virus hasn't cleared from your blood;
- For this reason, it is better to think in terms of a 'sustained virological response' rather than a 'cure'

Interested in finding out more?

Factsheets

- 02 Hepatitis C blood tests: antibodies & PCR
- 03 Hepatitis C treatment: combination therapy
- 19 Liver biopsy
- 22 PCR test
- 30 Common side effects of treatment

Brochures

- Moving on After Treatment: a post-treatment guide for people with hepatitis C (*Hepatitis Australia* and *ANCAHRD*)
- Thinking about treatment for hepatitis C? (*Hepatitis Australia*)
- Ready Set Combo: preparing for conventional hepatitis C treatment (*Hepatitis Australia* and *ANCAHRD*)
- Hepatitis C Information Kit (*Hepatitis Council of QLD*)

Organisations

- The Hepatitis Council of QLD
Ph 1800 648 491
- Your GP
- Your specialist or liver clinic nurse

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