

Preparing yourself for the treatment



In the treatment of hepatitis, you are already feeling run down as a result of the virus. On top of that, there is a genuine concern that the treatment could have significant side effects. We would like you to know that side effects not seen in all the patients, and not for all the time; & are fully reversible on discontinuation. Only 2-5% patients may discontinue therapy due to debilitating side effects. In fact some patients actually feel better while on interferon. It is important to know that serious side effects will need reduction of doses of interferon; but this is associated with a poorer results, especially if done in the first month or two.

Thus, adapting to a lifestyle to minimize adverse events will go a long way towards success.

It is best to start therapy when you have time to adapt to the symptoms, like when the work schedule & personal responsibilities are light. Schedule more strenuous activities during times of peak energy. The dose could be scheduled for the weekend so you get time to rest if symptoms arise, without needing to take medical leave.

Keep to a regular schedule about taking medication. Peginterferon injections are designed to maintain a constant "virus-killing" interferon level in the blood for 7 days; thus variations in taking doses

even by a day may not be good for maintaining good blood levels of Interferon, but will not cause an "overdose" or side effects..

Avoid sleeping for over 2-3 hours during daytime; a short half hour nap in the early afternoon may be allowed if you are used to it. Take regular exercise. All this helps to avoid sleeplessness when treatment starts. To help manage your fatigue, you should eat a quality, balanced diet, alternate between periods of rest and activity, increase your aerobic activity with exercise, and make sure to drink plenty of water. Regular times for meals are important, small frequent meals may be necessary in case nausea happens.

Coming for the Injection of Interferon:

The injection is best scheduled in the evening; if you get a fever you can sleep it off without affecting your daily routine. Take your evening meal before you come for the injection.

Have a hot bath; it helps reduce muscle pains, as well as you can safely take an injection. Take a Crocin tablet about an hour before the dose; to prevent interferon related flu-like symptoms. Your doctor can advise you an anti emetic tablet for nausea if you need it.

Interferon injections are given in the thigh or the abdomen; the site changing each time. The doctor will clean the area with spirit (alcohol) allowing



it to dry. The needle is very fine, it will feel like a mosquito prick.. the syringe, needle and cotton swab used on you should be safely disposed, so that over people are not exposed to what is contaminated with the virus.

Flu-like symptoms may last for 12 – 24 hours after the shot. You will feel weak, feverish, may have muscle pains and joint pains; with a low energy level. All these signs go with the Crocin tablet.

You may need to repeat the tablet after 6 hours, and you could take upto three tablets following the injection. If you need a fourth tablet, or your fever is beyond 101° F it may be unlikely to be due to interferon.

Once you have started taking the treatment

Once you have started the injections, you may need to be observed closely for the first 1 to 2 months. You may feel most of the side effects in this time, and they become significantly lesser beyond this time. Only your doctor will decide if your side effects are severe enough to reduce the dose for a short time. However, dose adjustments in the first 2 months are associated with a poorer cure. Thus it is better to be in touch with your treating doctor for close follow-up to avoid this from happening.

Be in touch with your doctor a couple of days before your next dose is due. He may want to ask for some blood tests. Commonly, a Hemogram & a Liver Function profile is done serially. For other symptoms, the doctor will advise appropriate tests. Knowing the results in good time will prevent any delays in taking the next dose