

# Understanding Your Journey

## UNDERSTANDING YOUR JOURNEY

The information in this booklet, including side effect management tips, is presented as a general guide and is **not intended as a substitute for professional medical advice.**

Your healthcare provider will always have the final decision on patient management, medications, and treatment options, and should be your primary source of information about your medical condition and treatment.



## What's Inside...

Hepatitis C Basics

Liver Basics

Hepatitis C and the Liver

Evaluation

Treatment Information

- Initiation
- Triple Therapy Basics
- Importance of Adherence
- Impact on Lifestyle and Practical Advice

Preparing for Treatment

- Side Effects
- Tests and Lab Work
- What's Next

Frequently Asked Questions

Support and Resources

Glossary

# Hepatitis C Basics

If you've been diagnosed with chronic hepatitis C virus (HCV), you may have a lot of questions, about both the disease and the treatment. Getting answers can help you feel in control and ready to fight this virus. Let's start with the basics.

## What is HCV?

HCV is a disease that affects the liver. Hepatitis literally means "inflammation of the liver." Hepatitis C is caused by a virus that is named for the disease – hepatitis C virus.

## How are people infected?

HCV spreads from person to person through blood. Many people who were infected with HCV years ago are just finding out now. Some people may never know for sure how they became infected. A person may become infected by:

- Using injection drugs, even once.
- Receiving a blood transfusion or organ transplant before 1992, or clotting factors made before 1987. (Today, these products are all screened for HCV.)
- Receiving kidney dialysis over a long period of time.
- Having unprotected sex with an infected partner. (Being infected this way is rare, but is more likely for people with many partners.)

## Why don't I feel sick?

Many people with chronic HCV never notice symptoms. This can make it hard to believe that you're infected. If you have symptoms, they may include mild fever, upset stomach, pain in the stomach area, and feeling tired. People who feel this way often think that they just have the flu. Tell your healthcare provider if you have noticed any symptoms.

## Might I infect my partner or my family?

HCV can only be spread through contact with infected blood. If you take certain precautions, you can protect those around you very well without having to do without love and affection on a day-to-day basis. Touching, kissing, and sharing food are all safe. But sharing anything that may have blood on it, like a toothbrush or razor, is not. You should definitely tell your partner and everybody close to you about your disease. You will find support from the people around you. Community brings strength.

## Do I have to tell my employer?

You are not obliged to tell your employer about your HCV infection. However, you should consider whether your job might involve the risk of transmitting the disease to others (for example, if your job might involve blood-blood contact, eg, medical professions, butchers, etc).

## Do I have a chance of regaining my health?

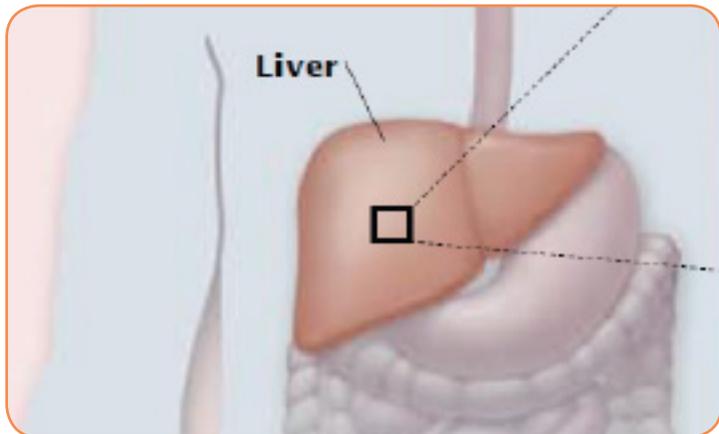
The answer is Yes. In some cases, HCV goes away on its own. But for most people, it is a chronic condition. The chances of conquering HCV have never been as good as they are today. Intensive research has resulted in the development of treatments that enable many HCV patients to conquer the virus. You can be one of them.

# Liver Basics

A healthy liver does many vital jobs:

- Processes alcohol and medications
- Makes digestive juices and helps process the food you eat
- Helps with blood clotting
- Helps your body fight infection
- Maintains the level of cholesterol and other chemicals

If the liver is severely damaged, it cannot do its job. Over time, chronic HCV may stop the liver from working as it should. You cannot survive without your liver.



# Hepatitis C and the Liver

Not all people with chronic HCV develop serious liver damage. For those who do, the damage often happens very slowly.

## Liver damage

Once HCV enters the body, it travels through the bloodstream to the liver. There, HCV can cause inflammation. This means that liver tissue becomes swollen and irritated.

Over time, inflamed liver tissue is replaced by scar tissue. As the liver becomes scarred, it may be less able to do its jobs.

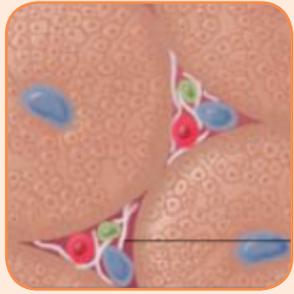
After many years of damage, the liver might even stop working. This can cause serious health problems, or even death.

## Liver damage happens slowly

The amount of scar tissue in the liver indicates the stage of liver damage. The more scar tissue there is, the later the stage. Liver damage progresses from stage to stage very slowly.

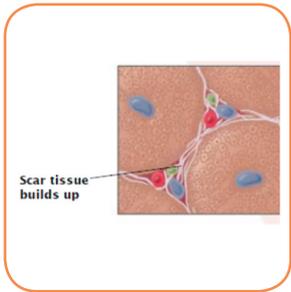
# UNDERSTANDING YOUR JOURNEY

There are 4 stages of liver damage:



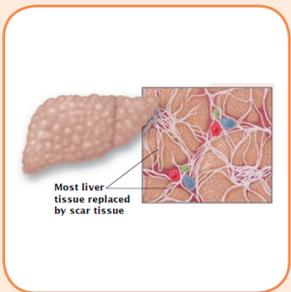
## Stage 1

Chronic HCV causes liver inflammation. This can damage some of the liver. Scar tissue may begin to form. This small amount of scar tissue doesn't keep the liver from working.



## Stage 2 and 3

More liver tissue is damaged, and more scar tissue builds up. But there is enough healthy liver tissue for the liver to keep doing its work.



## Stage 4

Much of the liver is damaged, and a large amount of scar tissue has built up. This is called cirrhosis. The liver may have a hard time doing its work. It may even stop working completely.

## Evaluation

### Giving a health history

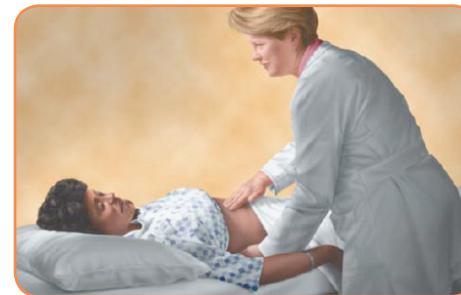
Your healthcare provider will ask questions about your health. This may involve questions that seem personal. It's important to answer honestly. You should also mention any symptoms that you may be experiencing.

*Your healthcare provider will also conduct tests and perform physical exams to assess your disease progression.*

### Assessment of liver damage

During an exam, your healthcare provider may feel your abdomen to see if your liver is swollen or painful. Tests may also be done to check your liver for damage. These tests may include:

- Ultrasound, which uses painless sound waves to create a picture of the liver
- CT scan, which is a type of x-ray that shows a detailed picture of the liver



- Liver biopsy, during which a needle is used to take a small sample of tissue from the liver; the sample is then viewed under a microscope to look for inflammation and scar tissue

## UNDERSTANDING YOUR JOURNEY

### Blood tests

Blood tests look for substances in your blood that are linked to HCV. Some tests that your healthcare provider may order for you include:

- **Anti-HCV (an antibody).** The body tries to fight HCV by making a substance called anti-HCV. This substance is found in the blood.
- **ALT (a liver enzyme).** Blood may contain more ALT if the liver has been damaged.
- **HCV RNA (a part of the virus).** Some tests can show pieces of HCV in infected blood.
- **Genotype (strain of the virus).** There are six HCV genotypes. A blood test can reveal which genotype you have.

After your blood tests, be sure to follow up with your healthcare provider. He or she can give you your test results and tell you what they mean.

Depending on the results of your liver assessment and blood work, as well as your medical history and other current medical conditions, your healthcare provider will determine how urgent it is for you to begin treatment.

## Treatment Information

### Initiation

#### What can I do?

*If you and your healthcare provider have decided to start therapy, accept the challenge. Don't become resigned. Adhere strictly to your doctor's treatment recommendations and take your medication exactly as prescribed. Learn all your options and as much as you can about HCV.*

Being well-informed will empower you to be strong in battling the virus.

#### Goal of treatment: CURE

The chances of conquering hepatitis C have never been as good as they are today. The main goal of hepatitis C treatment is to cure the disease. This goal involves full elimination (sustained virologic response) of the hepatitis C virus and normalization of liver function markers.

## Triple Therapy Basics

### What is triple therapy?

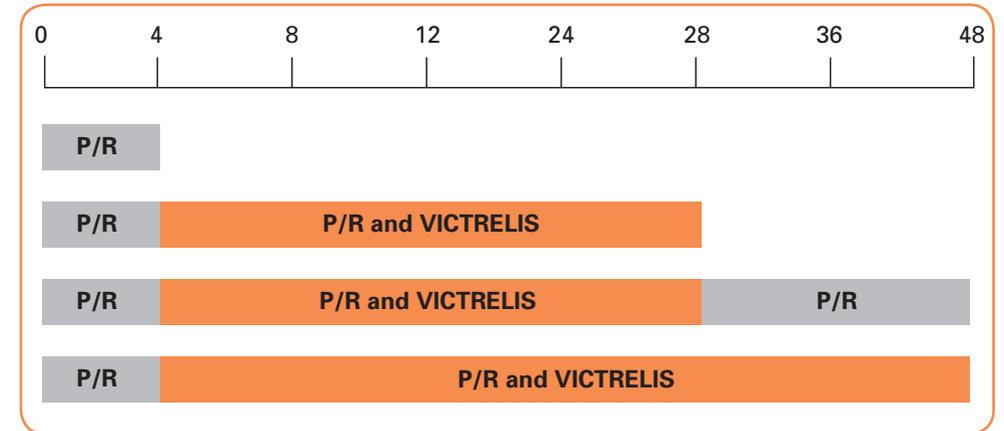
The best success has been seen in combatng HCV when 3 different medications are used all together. Each medication is necessary and attacks a different part of the infection cycle.

**Pegylated interferon** makes it harder for the virus to grow. Your body produces interferon in response to any viral infection. But in the case of HCV, success has been seen when using even more interferon than your body can make. This medication is injected weekly.

**Ribavirin** also stops viral growth, but it works through a different mechanism than interferon. These pills are taken twice daily.

**VICTRELIS** stops the virus' ability to create its own proteins, which it needs to survive and grow. Taking this with ribavirin and interferon gives you 3 different ways to stop the virus from growing. VICTRELIS (pills) is taken 3 times per day.

### How long will therapy last?

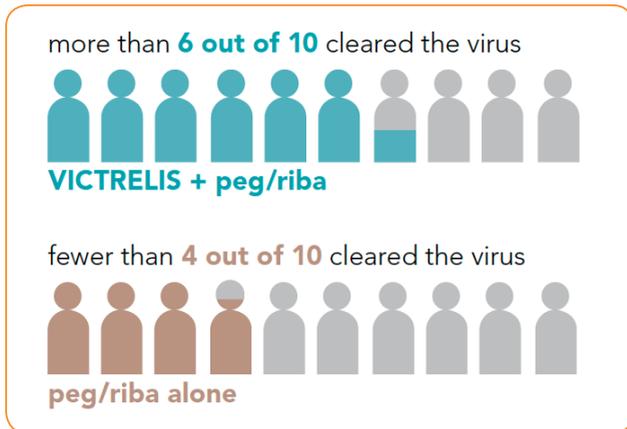


- VICTRELIS Triple Therapy will include peginterferon and ribavirin.
- Your duration of the VICTRELIS Triple Therapy will depend on:
  - If you are treatment naïve or have been previously treated for your HCV
  - How your HCV responds (HCV-RNA negativity) to the VICTRELIS Triple Therapy
  - How much fibroses (liver damage) the virus has caused in your liver
- Futility (Stopping) Rules: Discontinue the 3-drug regimen in naive patients with detectable HCV-RNA at Treatment Week 24 and previously treated patients with detectable HCV-RNA at Week 12 and Week 24.

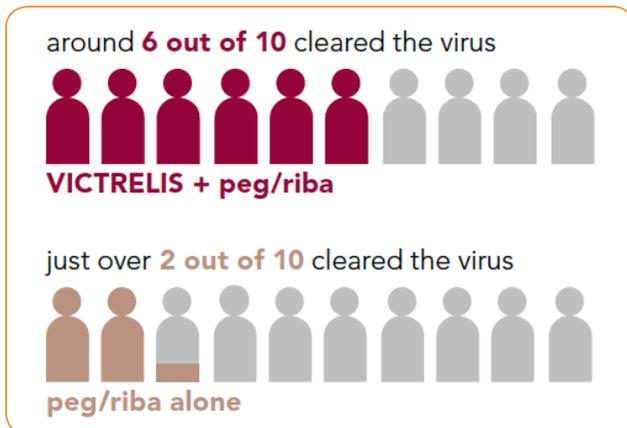
# UNDERSTANDING YOUR JOURNEY

## What are my chances for success?

**Treatment-naïve patients:** more than 6 out of 10 patients (63% to 66%) cleared the virus with VICTRELIS plus peg/riba compared to fewer than 4 out of 10 (38%) with peg/riba alone.



**Previously treated patients:** around 6 out of 10 patients (59% to 66%) cleared the virus with VICTRELIS plus peg/riba compared to just over 2 out of 10 (23%) with peg/riba alone.



## Importance of Adherence

### What can I do to help my treatment to succeed?

You as a patient are the essential factor in the success of your hepatitis C therapy. If you observe a few rules, you increase your chance of a cure.

#### *Rules for successful therapy*

- Inject your pegylated interferon at the same time every week. **Do not skip a week.**
- Sort your ribavirin capsules or tablets in a dosing gadget for a week at a time. Each morning and evening, take exactly the same number of prescribed ribavirin capsules or tablets or the same amount of ribavirin solution. **Never skip a single day.**
- If your doctor has prescribed VICTRELIS, sort the pills for a week at a time using a dosing aid. **Each morning, noon, and evening, always take exactly the same number of prescribed pills together with a meal. Never skip a single day.**

#### *Rules for successful treatment*

- Do not drink alcohol.
- Go to all your medical appointments as scheduled.
- Choose somebody in your family to be your partner and help you stick with the treatment.
- Do not take other medicines without asking your doctor first.
- Keep physically active, eat healthy food, and drink plenty of fluids.

## Impact on Lifestyle and Practical Advice

Give your liver a fighting chance by avoiding things that can make liver damage worse.

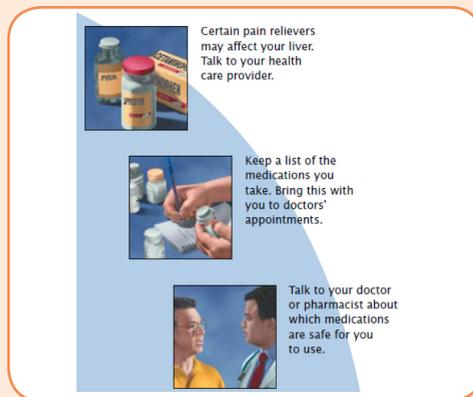
### Avoid Alcohol

Your liver works hard to process alcohol. With a chronic HCV infection, drinking alcohol may make you more likely to develop cirrhosis.

### Watching Medications and Supplements

Some medications and herbal supplements can harm your liver. To protect yourself:

- Check with your doctor before taking anything that you buy over the counter. He or she can tell you what's safe for you to use.
- Make sure you tell all your healthcare providers who prescribe medication for you that you have chronic HCV.



### Alternative Treatments

Some herbal supplements claim to protect the liver from scarring. These are being studied, but none have been medically proven to do what they claim. *Keep in mind that “natural” doesn’t mean safe.* Herbs, extracts, or supplements can damage your liver or interact with medications you’re taking. If you want to try an alternative treatment, **talk about it first with your healthcare provider.**

### Staying Healthy

Your body’s immune system fights against infections. It’s more able to do this when your body is healthy.

- Eat well: eat a healthy, high-fiber, low-fat diet
- Sleep well: get 7 to 9 hours of sleep per night and/or take short naps if needed
- Keep active: exercise regularly as directed
- Maintain a healthy weight
- Do not smoke

Doing activities that keep you in good spirits and upbeat, such as maintaining social activities and developing a positive outlook, can help you keep chronic HCV in perspective.

### Pregnancy definitely must be avoided

- This applies during treatment and for 4 months after treatment is finished.
- Men treated with ribavirin should not father any children for at least 7 months after the treatment is finished.
- Patients (male and female) must use 2 forms of birth control during and after treatment to avoid pregnancy.

## UNDERSTANDING YOUR JOURNEY

### Preventing the spread of hepatitis C

Since HCV is passed through blood, avoid letting other people come in contact with your blood. With a little extra care, you can keep the people around you safe.



#### Dispose of Needles Safely

If you use needles for any reason, don't share them. Keep syringes capped between uses and don't let anyone else use them. After using a needle, dispose of it safely in a puncture-proof container.



#### Practice Safer Sex

Rarely, HCV can pass from person to person during sex. Using latex condoms correctly every time is the only effective way to protect against most diseases that are spread through sex. Women with chronic HCV infection should avoid having sex during their menstrual periods.



#### Don't Share Toiletries

Even if you can't see it, tiny amounts of blood can be on razors, toothbrushes, nail clippers, or other personal care items. Don't share these items with anyone.



#### Care for Open Wounds

If you're bleeding, try to take care of the wound yourself. Anyone who helps you should wear latex gloves. Use bleach to clean up any spilled blood. Cover open cuts or sores with a bandage so others will not be exposed to your blood.

## Preparing for Treatment Side Effects

Tell your healthcare provider if you experience any side effects

Commonly reported side effects of VICTRELIS treatment, in combination with peginterferon alfa and ribavirin, are:

- Flu-like symptoms, such as headache, fatigue, fever and chills
- Shortness of breath, dizziness
- Cough, dry mouth or taste change, thirst
- Loss of appetite, weight loss
- Nausea (feeling sick), vomiting or diarrhea/intestinal gas
- Unusual weakness, painful and swollen joints, muscular aches and pain
- Not being able to sleep, depression, anxiety, irritability
- Hair loss/change in hair texture
- Itch, rash, or dry skin
- Depression

# UNDERSTANDING YOUR JOURNEY

Consult your doctor immediately if any of the following side effects occur:

- Tiredness, shortness of breath, chest pain, or if you look pale
- Symptoms of an infection, such as a sore throat, fever, toothaches, or chills
- Swollen abdomen, swelling of the legs, bruising, vomiting blood, or difficulty in staying awake or alert.

**You may need urgent medical attention.**

## Tests and Lab Work

Your healthcare provider may use blood tests, liver biopsies, and ultrasound to monitor your chronic HCV. Some of these tests are done on a regular basis and others are done less often.

Your healthcare provider may choose to do a group of blood tests called a liver panel. These tests will check how healthy your liver is and how well it is functioning.

Your healthcare provider will check blood levels of:

- **Liver enzymes** that might leak into the blood when the liver is damaged, such as:
  - Alanine aminotransferase (ALT)
  - Aspartate aminotransferase (AST)

- **Albumin**, a protein whose levels go down when the liver is damaged
- **Bilirubin**, a substance whose levels go up when the liver is not working
- **Viral load** will show the amount of virus in the blood

Your healthcare provider may also do liver biopsies or ultrasound to check the size and health of your liver, including the stage of liver disease.

## Monitoring

- See your healthcare provider regularly
- Talk to your healthcare provider about changes in symptoms or new symptoms
- Follow up with test results for:
  - Blood
  - Liver biopsies
  - Ultrasound

## What's Next?

Appointment	Date	Time	Location
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____

# Frequently Asked Questions

## Why me?

Let this question go. Nobody can answer it. Don't look back. Look ahead. Accept the challenge. Your personal commitment is called for now. Battle the disease with your doctor and your family. You can win.

## Do I have a chance of regaining my health?

The answer is Yes.

The chances of conquering hepatitis C have never been as good as they are today. Intensive research and development has resulted over the past number of years in the development of treatments that enable many hepatitis C patients to conquer the virus. You can be one of them.

## Might I infect my partner or my family?

Hepatitis C is transferred by exposure to blood. If you take certain precautions, you can protect those around you very well without having to do without love and affection on a day-to-day basis. You should definitely tell your partner and everybody close to you about your disease. You will find support from the people around you. Community brings strength.

## Do I have to tell my employer?

You are not obliged to tell your employer about your hepatitis C infection. However, you should consider whether your job might involve the risk of transmitting the disease to others (for example, if your job might involve blood-blood contact, eg medical professions, butchers, etc).

## Who can I turn to for help?

A doctor who is specialized in the treatment of hepatitis patients can provide advice and assistance in terms of the decisions lying ahead, and can also advise you on modern treatment options. This kind of specialist doctor and his team have extensive experience in the treatment of hepatitis C infection and will do all they can to support you. Don't be shy about asking questions and expressing your anxieties. There are a large number of hepatitis self-help groups to get in touch with. These are forums where you can share your fears, concerns, experience and successes with other patients.

## What can I do?

Accept the challenge. Don't become resigned. Adhere strictly to your doctor's treatment recommendations and take your medication exactly as prescribed. Avail of the information options available, such as this brochure, and inform yourself about your disease. Being well informed will empower you to make more conscious decisions and be strong in battling the virus.

## Support and Resources

Maybe you took advantage of some of the community resources available while you were going through treatment.

Even if you didn't, one way to help you stay on your journey is to help others through theirs.

Contact your local community resources to see how others can benefit from your valuable experience, so they can see what it's like at the end of that first part of the journey.

**VA Clinical Public Health Programs: Hep C**  
www.hepatitis.va.gov/patient  
800-827-1000

**Centers for Disease Control and Prevention**  
www.cdc.gov/hepatitis  
800-CDC-INFO  
(800-232-4636)

**American Liver Foundation**  
www.liverfoundation.org  
212-668-1000 or  
800-465-4837

**Hepatitis Foundation International**  
www.hepfi.org  
800-891-0707

**National Digestive Disease Information Clearinghouse (NDDIC)**  
http://digestive.niddk.nih.gov/ddiseases/pubs/hepatitis  
800-891-5389

**All About Hep C**  
www.allabouthepc.com

## Glossary

**Acute Hepatitis:** A suddenly occurring hepatitis virus infection that clears up in 6 months or less.

**Alanine Aminotransferase (ALT):**  
An enzyme produced by liver cells. ALT levels are measured to monitor possible liver damage.

**Alfa Interferon:** A form of interferon made by the body.

**Alopecia:** Thinning or loss of hair.

**Analgesic:** A drug that relieves pain.

**Anemia:** A condition characterized by a decrease in the amount of hemoglobin in the blood, resulting in reduced oxygen supply to tissues; may be caused by a decrease in the number of red blood cells.

**Antibody:** A type of immune protein molecule that is produced when bacteria or viruses enter the body. A specific antibody is manufactured against each invader. It is one part of the immune system, which consists of many specialized cells working together to fight infections.

**Blood-Borne Substances:** Anything that is in and carried by the blood throughout the body.

**Carrier:** A person who can give a disease to others, and who may or may not have any symptoms of that disease.

**Chronic Hepatitis:** A hepatitis virus infection that lasts for 6 months or longer (with or without symptoms).

**Cirrhosis:** A progressive disease of the liver where large amounts of scar tissue replace working liver tissue. Cirrhosis affects blood flow within the liver as well as liver function.

**Clinical Trials:** Carefully controlled tests with humans to determine if drugs and treatments are safe and effective.

**Combination Therapy:** Treating a medical condition with 2 or more medications.

**Enzymes:** Chemicals produced naturally by the body to speed up many different chemical reactions.

**Gastroenterologist:** A doctor who specializes in diseases of the stomach and intestines, including the liver.

**Genotype:** A one-of-a-kind set of genetic information that all people, plants, animals, and viruses contain, which determines their form and function.

**Hepatitis:** Inflammation of the liver sometimes accompanied by jaundice, enlarged liver, fatigue, and nausea. Most commonly caused by a virus that attacks the liver (viral hepatitis).

**Hepatologist:** A doctor who specializes in liver disease.

**Inflammation:** An immune response indicated by redness, heat, and pain. Can also include swelling.

# UNDERSTANDING YOUR JOURNEY

**Jaundice:** Yellowing of the skin and eyes from a buildup of bilirubin in blood and tissue. This may be a sign that the liver is not working well.

**Nonresponders:** People who don't respond to a treatment by a certain time or date.

**Relapse:** The return of a disease after the patient was thought to be cured.

**Remission:** The complete disappearance or lessening of disease symptoms, resulting either from treatment or spontaneously (on its own).

**Screening:** Looking for disease or illness in people without known symptoms.

**Seroconvert:** Change in serum constituents such that prior negative test results become positive.

**Spleen:** A body organ that "cleans" circulating blood by removing old or defective blood cells.

**Sustained Response:** A long-term, positive result of medical treatment.

**Teratogenic:** Able to cause defects in normal embryonic development, (birth defects).

**Transmission:** The way a disease or illness can move or spread from one person to another.

**White Blood Cells:** An important group of cells making up the body's immune system of defense. They can actually leave the bloodstream to seek out and destroy "invaders" such as viruses, poisons, bacteria, and tumor cells.



## Wallet Card

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Medication	Dose	Times per Day
------------	------	---------------

_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

Other Health Issues

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



Copyright © 2012 Merck Sharp & Dohme Corp.,  
a subsidiary of Merck & Co., Inc., Whitehouse  
Station, NJ, USA. All rights reserved.

XXXX-0000000-0000 00/00