

will respond better to medical advice and rest.

## SUMMARY

In summary there are six areas to which we might usefully attend in developing good coping strategies and positive relationships:

**a. Think positively.** Focus on your strengths and abilities and on developing these. Acknowledge your difficulties and seek advice in combatting these.

**b. Develop useful skills.** Learn to ask questions of your medical team and to talk accurately about Hepatitis C to those with whom you wish to communicate. Consider courses in time management, relationship skills, child management or anything that might make life easier for you.

**c. Motivate yourself** and others by giving and getting constructive feedback. If your partner does something that you find particularly helpful, for example collects shopping, express your thanks and say how helpful it was. This will make the other person feel good and more likely to do the same in the future. There is no need to feel inadequate if you have to employ someone to carry out household duties, for example cutting the grass.

**d. Learn to organise situations** to your advantage so that you can rest when necessary, match your task demands to your energy levels and so on.

## **e. Take appropriate care of yourself.**

There may be a tendency to feel guilty or bad if you are not as able or as efficient as you were before. This is a destructive reaction. The better you take care of yourself the better you will be able to contribute to the care of those you love.

**f. Note your emotions or moods** as cues as to how things are going generally. Often, the way we feel is a consequence of how well or how poorly we are coping in the other five areas noted above. If you develop good habits in these areas you are more likely to feel better emotionally. You will feel more competent, confident, enthusiastic and above all, more in control.

Remember that small changes can make a big difference and many small changes accumulated over time can be truly life enhancing.

Hepatitis C is a serious condition and demands serious attention. However, it is a part of some people's lives, not the whole. It is possible to live very well with Hepatitis C. Hopefully this leaflet will go some way towards helping you to do that.

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September 2004



# RELATIONSHIP ISSUES & HEPATITIS C

Hepatitis C presents many challenges to those suffering from the condition and their families, namely:

- shock of diagnosis
- pains and aches and fatigue which accompany the condition
- depression
- loss of sex drive
- side effects of treatment
- general disruption of day to day living.

All of these consequences impact heavily on psychological wellbeing. An important factor in regaining and maintaining psychological health is the quality of the interpersonal relationships that we enjoy.

Relationships that are particularly important in this instance are those with partners, children, intimate friends and medical teams. It is very important therefore that those close to the person with Hepatitis C understand the condition clearly in all its aspects and that clear lines of communication are set up early on in the process of coping.

## **1. IDENTIFY A CONFIDANTE**

Following diagnosis negative emotions such as fear, embarrassment, anger and may make it difficult to think clearly and to act rationally. It would help greatly at this point

if a strong confidante is identified who can provide immediate and consistent support to the person with Hepatitis C. This person might also attend medical appointments and facilitate clear communication of details of diagnosis and treatment options. This may be a partner, close friend or a member of a support group. The most important thing is that the person with Hepatitis C trusts and gets on well with this individual.

## **2. COMMUNICATION**

A person with Hepatitis C may find that previous roles such as parent, lover, employee are compromised by their condition. It is likely that they will oscillate between feeling fine at some times to feeling totally wiped out at others. Again, clear communication to relevant people will facilitate understanding and make bad periods easier to bear. It also helps those involved to provide the best kind of support. The tendency to try to keep going and to appear as though nothing is wrong can increase the pressure on all concerned.

Watch out for the tendency to mind read. Do not assume that everybody is clear about everything. Check things out occasionally. Even in the case where partners have a good relationship and enjoy emotional closeness and intimacy it is nice to be told occasionally that you are loved and appreciated, rather than have to assume it.

## **3. DISRUPTED RELATIONSHIPS**

If relationships become seriously disrupted then professional help should be sought from a suitably qualified counsellor or clinical

psychologist. It is normal that tension and stress increase in response to a threatening diagnosis and changes in previous routines, but such stresses usually diminish as the new situation is understood and a sense of direction and positive coping strategies are identified and put in place.

## **4. COPING STRATEGIES**

Positive coping strategies include

- careful organisation of the day so that tasks are accomplished as well as they can be;
- time management so that demands are taken on at times when energy levels are highest;
- making regular time for discussion with ones partner and children (where relevant) so that changes in energy levels, mood and so on can be explained and understood.

## **5. RESOLVING DIFFICULTIES**

It is important to remember that frustration, arguments and tensions wax and wane in all families and that all disruptions are not the result of Hepatitis C. Love and support are rarely lost as a consequence of such ups and downs although the person with Hepatitis C may at times feel this to be the case as their condition makes them more vulnerable to loss of confidence and self-esteem. Making up after confrontations is important and reassurance that love and support are available is of particular significance to the person with Hepatitis C.

## **6. MAKE TIME**

It is strongly suggested that time be set aside to enjoy those who are close to you. Fit in walks, films, meals, chats, discussions, debates, physical intimacy, all of the things that add spice to living. We often make the mistaken assumption that things will just fall into place in time if left to take their own course: that we will go out with our partner when the mood is right, we will sit down and chat with our children when the atmosphere is appropriate, we will visit friends when we feel in better form and so on.

It is better to arrange such activities systematically and to partake even if we do not feel particularly enthusiastic initially. The likelihood is that we will become absorbed and finish up enjoying the involvement. It is similar to doing exercise. We may have to force ourselves to go to the gym or face the cold and rain to go for a run. Afterwards however we are likely to feel a sense of achievement and even exhilaration. Rather than waiting for the right mood to act, act and the right mood will often result.

## **7. PHYSICAL IMPACT**

Obviously the physical impact of Hepatitis C must be taken into account. There will be times when the physical energy is just not available to become involved to the extent that one might like. It is important to try note the difference between a physical fatigue that is part of the condition and a lack of motivation that is due more to emotional or psychological factors. The latter can be positively influenced by the suggestions above. Fatigue due to physical causes