

Hepatitis B Symptoms

- Many people with hepatitis B have no symptoms.
- Symptoms for hepatitis B are not always obvious.
- It's important to get regular liver check-ups even if you don't feel sick.

Acute versus chronic hepatitis B

There are two ways that hepatitis B can affect you. It can give you an **acute** illness or a **chronic** illness.

1. **Acute** hepatitis B means the virus might make you sick for a short time but then you will feel better. Some people with acute hepatitis B naturally clear the virus. If the virus stays in your liver for more than six months, then you have chronic hepatitis B.
2. **Chronic** hepatitis B means the virus stays in your liver for your whole life. You may not always feel sick, but over time the virus can hurt your liver so it does not work properly.¹

Acute hepatitis B symptoms

Most children do not get symptoms from acute hepatitis B, but are much more likely than adults to develop chronic hepatitis B.¹

Among adults, the symptoms for acute hepatitis B can include:

- loss of appetite (which means not feeling hungry)
- nausea and vomiting
- tiredness
- abdominal (or belly) pain
- muscle and joint pain
- yellowish eyes and skin (also known as jaundice)
- dark urine and pale coloured poo.²

If you have acute hepatitis B, the symptoms might not be very bad and may not last very long. Only a small number of people with acute hepatitis B become sick enough to recognise the symptoms. If you do become very sick, you should see a doctor straight away because it can be life threatening.³

Chronic hepatitis B symptoms

Many people with chronic hepatitis B do not experience any symptoms. If you do have symptoms, they could include:

- tiredness, depression and irritability
- pain in the liver (which is the upper, right side of your belly)
- nausea and vomiting
- loss of appetite (which means not feeling hungry)
- aches and pains in your joints.⁴



Hepatitis B symptoms

You might feel healthy if you have chronic hepatitis B, but it can still seriously damage your liver over time. Some of the things that can happen to your liver over time are:

- **liver damage** (sometimes called fibrosis), which means your liver becomes hard and does not work as well
- **cirrhosis**, which means the liver damage has gotten worse and you have a lot of scarring on your liver
- **liver failure**, which means your liver stops working
- **liver cancer.**

The only way to know if you have hepatitis B is to get a hep B blood test done by your doctor. Talk to your doctor if you have any symptoms of hepatitis B or think you could have it.

If you have hepatitis B, it is important to visit your doctor regularly for liver check-ups, even if you don't have any symptoms.

Notes

References

- 1 ASHM. (2014). B Positive: All you wanted to know about hepatitis B. Darlinghurst, NSW: ASHM. Retrieved from www.ashm.org.au/products/product/1976963310
 - 2 American Family Physician. (2019, March 1). Hepatitis B. Retrieved from American Family Physician: www.aafp.org/afp/2019/0301/p314-s1.html
 - 3 Department of Health and Human Services Victoria. (2018, September). Hepatitis B. Retrieved from Better Health Channel: www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/conditionsandtreatments/hepatitis-b
 - 4 Rutherford, A. E. (2017, November). Overview of Chronic Hepatitis. Retrieved from MSD Manual: Consumer version: www.msmanuals.com/en-au/home/liver-and-gallbladder-disorders/hepatitis/overview-of-chronic-hepatitis
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