

# Treatment for hepatitis B

- **Treatment for hepatitis B helps maintain good health but is not a cure.**
- **Not all people with hepatitis B will need treatment.**
- **Regular liver check-ups help determine when you need treatment.**

Treatment for hepatitis B helps manage the effects of the virus but it is not a cure. In general, people who have chronic hepatitis B but do not have any signs of current liver damage will not need treatment. It is important to watch for liver damage by getting liver check-ups every six months.<sup>1</sup>

If you have signs of liver damage you should think about having treatment for hepatitis B. There are a lot of factors that can influence when the best time to start treatment is. You should talk to your doctor about whether treatment is right for you.<sup>2</sup>

There are a few different medications to treat chronic hepatitis B. They are available through the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS), which means people with a Medicare card can get them at low cost.

## Anti-viral treatment

The most common medications are anti-viral tablets, which you take every day for a year or longer. The following anti-viral medicines are currently used in Australia to treat hepatitis B:<sup>2</sup>

- **Entecavir (Baraclude®)**
- **Tenofovir (Viread®)**

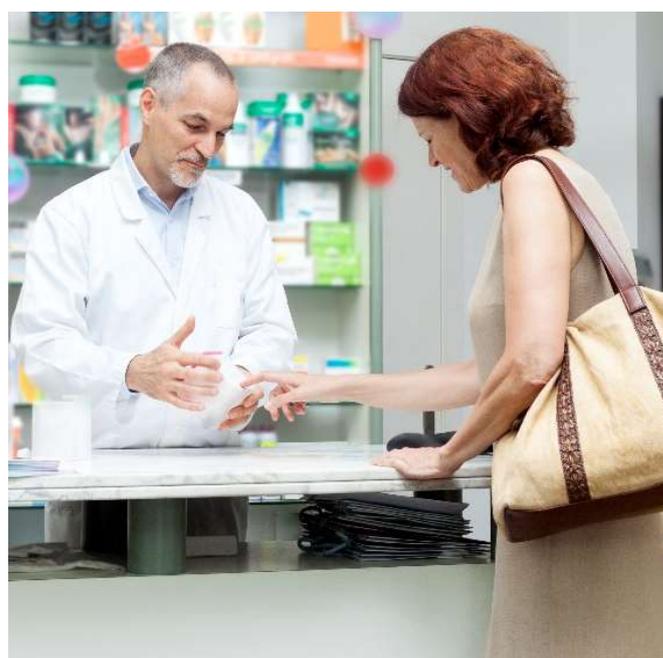
Both these medications are very effective for treating hepatitis B, however, they need to be taken every day to be effective. If you stop and start the medication it can become less effective and your liver could get damaged.<sup>3</sup>

A less common form of treatment is with interferon, which is given by injection once a week, usually for six months to a year. It can have many side effects for some people.<sup>2</sup>

## Who needs treatment?

Not everyone who has hepatitis B needs treatment. In some people the virus is there in small amounts but it is not causing any damage—it is sleeping. It can stay sleeping for a long time, but it can also wake up and start causing damage to your liver. This could happen at any time, so it is important to go for regular liver check-ups.<sup>3</sup>

You may need hepatitis B treatment if the virus is damaging your liver.<sup>2</sup>



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## What does hepatitis B treatment do?

Hepatitis B treatment works by stopping the hepatitis B virus from multiplying, or slowing it down as much as possible. This reduces your risk of getting serious liver disease and allows your liver to repair some of the damage so it works better. It is very unlikely that any of these medications will cure hepatitis B, but it is important that you keep taking them.

During treatment, your doctor will track your blood tests carefully to look for signs of antiviral resistance. If there are signs of resistance, they will change your antiviral tablets or pause your treatment.<sup>2</sup>

## Notes

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- 1 ASHM. (2019). Hepatitis B. Retrieved from All Good: <http://allgood.org.au/english/hbv/>
- 2 ASHM. (2014). B Positive: All you wanted to know about hepatitis B. Darlinghurst, NSW: ASHM. Retrieved from <https://www.ashm.org.au/products/product/1976963310>
- 3 Davies, J., Bukulatjpi, S., Sharma, S., Johnston, V., & Davis, J. (2014). Hepbstory. Retrieved from Menzies School of Health and Research: <https://www.menzies.edu.au/hepbstory/>
- 4 Hepatitis Queensland. (2018, June). Chronic hepatitis B: Phases. Retrieved from Hepatitis Queensland: [www.hepald.asn.au/resources/](http://www.hepald.asn.au/resources/)

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