

Editorial

Hepatitis C Patients should go easy on Sugary, Salty & Fatty Foods

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Editor

There are an estimated eight million patients of Hepatitis C in Pakistan and the number is continuously on the rise. It is alarming that the majority of Hepatitis C patients have myths and misconceptions about their diet and are confused on what to eat and what to avoid.

The health experts have expressed great concern on the subject, saying that there is a need to create awareness among Hepatitis C patients about bad and good foods for their liver. Hepatitis causes inflammation and necrosis (the affected cells become oxygen deprived) of the liver cells.

Everything you eat and drink passes through your liver. The liver changes food into stored energy and chemicals necessary for life. A bad diet for someone with Hepatitis C can sometimes lead to aggravate liver problems.

He added that Hepatitis C patients should eat a diet that is low in fats, sugars, salt and high in fresh fruits, vegetables and whole grains. "Hepatitis C patients should eliminate alcohol, meat, fast or junk foods, colas and coffee from their diet." If your diet contains too many calories, you will gain weight. Being overweight is linked to the build-up of fat in the liver, called 'fatty liver'. Fatty liver for a person with hepatitis C may develop cirrhosis.

Foods which should be avoided by Hepatitis C patients are saturated fats, meat, alcohol, spicy foods, fried foods, fatty foods, salty foods, dairy products (animal), white bread, white flour, sugar and sweets, ice cream, chocolates, coffee, caffeine, butter, fast/junk foods, colas, ghee, processed and refined foods.

All non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, lipid lowering agents (statins), antibiotics such as augmentin, erythromycin and tetracycline etc and hormones such as testosterone and vitamin A and iron supplements are hepatotoxic medications and should not be taken by hepatitis patients without taking advice from a qualified physician.

If hepatitis C patient eats meat, he just added stress to the digestive process, stressing the liver, gall bladder, and pancreas. Meat is one of the hardest foods to digest. It can sit in the stomach for 5-7 days and ferment,

causing flu like symptoms, gas, bloating, and even more stress.

Caffeine, of course, is a stimulant and stimulating the liver causes stress to the liver. If hepatitis C patient is in the habit of drinking caffeinated beverages, he needs to eliminate them slowly. Hydrogenated oils are another product that is hard for liver to handle. The dairy foods are also extremely hard to digest. However, homemade yoghurt is not considered a dairy product and can be taken. Hepatitis C patients should avoid artificial fruit juices, as they are high in concentrate sugar. Sugar is shock to the liver and stresses the digestive process, stresses the pancreas and it feed the virus. The fresh fruit juices might be taken in moderation. Similarly, artificial sweeteners are also extremely hard to process. Hepatitis C patients should be aware of the fact that poor nutrition can worsen liver problems. Overeating (large meal at one time) should be avoided as it can lead to the build-up fat in the liver. Eat small meals at regular intervals. Do not eat for five hours before bedtime. Eat slowly by chewing thoroughly.

The fresh fruits, vegetables, cereals, broccoli, cauliflower, cabbage, radish, garlic, onions, legumes (beans, lentils), oatmeal, cinnamon and whole grains are good foods for Hepatitis C patients. "Whole grains are an excellent source of fibre and nutrients including selenium, potassium and magnesium. Whole grain foods include whole wheat bread, pasta, brown and wild rice and popcorn."

In regard of protein diet, hepatitis C patients might take beans, fish, egg white, and chicken but not chicken wings in moderate quantity. "Lemon juice mixed with water, upon rising in the morning, 30 minutes before eating and teaspoonful of olive oil in breakfast cereals has been shown to stimulate the production of bile. Homemade vegetable soup may also be taken.

He said that people infected with Hepatitis C have higher rates of diabetes than those who are not infected, but a good diet can help reduce body fat and control blood sugar. This lowers the risk of developing diabetes. "The goal of Hepatitis C patients should be to take as much stress and strain off the liver.