

By Jill Cadman

# Avoid

## Smoking and Drinking if You Have Hepatitis C


About four million people in the U.S. have the hepatitis C virus (HCV). HCV can cause an infection of the liver that is usually spread through blood contact with an infected person. Many HIV+ people are also infected with HCV. If not treated, hepatitis can cause cirrhosis (scarring) of the liver. This can lead to severe sickness or even death.

A new study has found that people with HCV should avoid smoking cigarettes and drinking alcohol because both habits can further damage their livers. The study used levels of the liver enzyme ALT to check for liver damage. (Higher ALT levels can be a warning sign of liver damage.)

The researchers found that drinking alcohol and smoking more or less doubled the risk of having high ALT levels. People who smoked a pack or more of cigarettes each day and frequently drank alcohol had a risk of elevated ALT levels that was seven times higher than for those who did not drink or smoke.

The researchers who conducted the study stated that people who have HCV “are strongly advised not to smoke and drink alcohol to reduce the possible risk for aggravating (their) liver dysfunction.”

A person with HIV and HCV can become very sick. The added strain that HCV puts on the immune system makes it even harder for the body to fight diseases and infections. If you have HIV and HCV, you need to get regular medical attention for both conditions. You can also help take care of your body by avoiding habits, such as smoking and drinking, that can make you worse.

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*Jill Cadman is a long-time HIV treatment advocate and educator. She is currently the Managing Editor of PositiveWords.*

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