

The Top Three Alternative Treatments for Hepatitis C

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For those who are not able to conquer the Hepatitis C virus with combination therapy, discover three holistic approaches that can help improve your treatment odds and/or stave off liver damage.

by Nicole Cutler, L.Ac.

The livers of an estimated four to five million Americans are infected with the Hepatitis C virus (HCV). Although the scientific community has made great strides in understanding and treating HCV, the current standard of treatment only has a 50 percent success rate. That statistic leaves a lot of people fighting this disease on their own – searching for ways to make HCV treatment more effective and to prevent their liver function from deteriorating.

Besides instituting lifestyle changes that prolong liver health, three of the most sought after approaches for helping the liver fend off damage from Hepatitis C fall under the domain of complementary and alternative medicine (CAM). There are a seemingly infinite number of CAM choices claiming to aid the liver. However, only a few are consistently reported to improve HCV treatment success, relieve symptoms and stall the progression of liver damage.

According to Paul Martin, MD, FACP, chief of the division of hepatology and professor of medicine at the University of Miami, “Western medicine does not have all the answers. Patients who have been treated in the past [for Hepatitis C] and failed to respond are interested in exploring various therapeutic options.”

Published in *The Canadian Journal of Gastroenterology* in 2007, researchers interviewed people infected with chronic HCV to determine the most prevalent strategies for managing their liver disease. Accounting for nearly half of interviewed subjects, the researchers concluded that the use of CAM in chronic HCV patients is significant. In nearly every similar type of investigation, milk thistle supplementation is determined to be the most common CAM therapy for Hepatitis C.

In addition to milk thistle, supplementing with N-Acetyl Cysteine and using Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) rank among the top strategies for defending against the Hepatitis C virus.

1. *Milk Thistle* – By far the most popular herbal remedy for Hepatitis C, milk thistle also has the most scientific studies to back up its use. Demonstrating high levels of safety with few reported side effects, studies on milk thistle have claimed that it can:

- Reduce liver inflammation
- Exert an antiviral effect against HCV
- Stimulate the growth of liver cells
- Protect against damage to liver cells
- Reduce the severity of HCV treatment side effects

Various clinical trials have shown that milk thistle in the form of silybin phytosome (like [Maximum Milk Thistle](#) or [UltraThistle](#)) has a higher rate of absorption and, thus, is more effective at protecting the liver.

2. *N-Acetyl Cysteine*- An amino acid that rapidly metabolizes to glutathione, [N-Acetyl Cysteine \(NAC\)](#) is considered to be an extreme antioxidant. Produced in the liver, glutathione is used by virtually every cell of the body to neutralize toxins. It is even administered by physicians during an acetaminophen overdose to prevent the fatal destruction of liver cells. Research from Europe exemplifies why NAC is so valuable to people with Hepatitis C:

After measuring levels of glutathione in the liver, blood and lymphocytes of patients with chronic HCV, Italian researchers found that the less glutathione present, the more severe their liver disease was. By studying people with hepatitis, scientists from Pamplona, Spain suggested that replenishing glutathione levels improves their response to interferon treatment.

3. *Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM)* – Originating in China over 2000 years ago, TCM is an entire system of healthcare that combines many modalities – like nutrition, acupuncture, heat therapies (such as moxibustion), exercise, [massage](#), meditation and herbal medicine.

Due to its long history of treating liver disorders, many people with HCV turn to Traditional Chinese Medicine. Utilized by trained practitioners, protocols have been developed over the past decade that successfully help HCV-infected people decrease symptoms, normalize or lower liver enzyme levels and slow down the progression of liver disease.

Because of the need for improved solutions, pharmaceutical companies have prioritized Hepatitis C drug research and development. Their commitment to finding a cure for HCV means that therapies with success rates exceeding 50 percent are just around the corner. In the meantime, many with Hepatitis C use complementary and alternative medicine to keep the virus at bay. Between milk thistle, N-Acetyl Cysteine and Traditional Chinese Medicine, many sufferers are able to keep their remaining liver cells as healthy as possible – so that

when a cure for Hepatitis C is available, they will be ready and waiting.

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