



*Living Well  
with Hepatitis B*



## ***What's inside***

Top 5 things to know for people living with hepatitis B	03
Section 1: Living with hepatitis B	04
Section 2: Care for others	07
Section 3: Your rights	10
Further support	12

# Top 5 things to know for people living with hepatitis B

1

You can live well with hepatitis B: Have regular check-ups, avoid alcohol and smoking, eat a balanced diet, avoid sugary processed food, stay active, and find someone or a group who can support you.

2

If you are not seen in a hepatitis B clinic, your GP can help by referring you to get your care sorted.

3

Hepatitis B is transmitted through blood and body fluids.

4

It is not passed through hugging, sharing food, breastmilk or everyday contact.

5

The hepatitis B vaccine prevents people from getting the virus. Your partner, family and household members can be tested and vaccinated for free by the NHS.



## Section 1 Living with hepatitis B

### Q. I've just been diagnosed with hepatitis B. What should I expect?

Firstly, do not be afraid. Most people live a healthy and happy life with hepatitis B. However, living with hepatitis B may require lifestyle changes, including regular medical check-ups and maintaining a healthy lifestyle to support liver health. You should aim to avoid or limit alcohol, as this can strain the liver. You should also reach out to friends, family, or medical professionals if you need extra emotional support.

### Q. What is hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is a virus that affects the liver. Many people get better after an acute phase, and the virus goes away. For some, it stays in the body for more than 6 months – this is called chronic hepatitis B. With regular appointments and care, most people live well with hepatitis B. These check-ups help keep your liver healthy and can prevent problems like scarring (cirrhosis) or liver cancer.

There are different types of hepatitis:

- Hepatitis A: Usually transmitted through contaminated food and water.
- **Hepatitis B: Transmitted through blood and bodily fluids. It is common worldwide, with millions of people affected**
- Hepatitis C: Mostly transmitted through blood
- Hepatitis D: Only affects people with hepatitis B (you will be tested

- for this in your first appointment)
- Hepatitis E: Transmitted through contaminated water.

### Q. How did I get hepatitis B?

There is no way of knowing for sure. For most people living with chronic hepatitis B in the UK, the virus was acquired at birth or in early childhood abroad. If your mother had hepatitis B when you were born, the virus could have passed to you during delivery. This is called mother-to-child transmission and is more common in countries where hepatitis B occurs frequently. The hepatitis B virus can also be passed on through contact with unsterilised medical equipment, blood, or body fluids such as semen or vaginal fluids. Other possible ways include sexual contact, unsafe tattooing or piercing, and sharing needles.

### Q. What are some symptoms of hepatitis B?

Many people with hepatitis B do not show symptoms. In the early stages, some people have a mild flu-like experience. When symptoms do occur, they may include:

- Feeling tired
- Skin and eyes turning yellow (jaundice)
- Dark urine
- Stomach pain
- Feeling like you want to vomit (nausea)
- Vomiting
- Loss of appetite
- Muscle or joint pain

**Q. What is the difference between acute and chronic hepatitis B?**

Acute hepatitis B means you recently caught the virus, and you might show symptoms. Your body might clear it within six months, and you are unlikely to have a hepatitis B infection again. 95% of healthy adults infected with hepatitis B recover completely and clear the virus within this time. Chronic hepatitis B means the virus did not go away after six months, and it stayed in your body. This can cause liver damage, so you need regular check-ups and medication if necessary, to protect your liver.

**Q. Can I cure my chronic hepatitis B?**

There is no cure yet, but long-term hepatitis B can be managed. Some people need medication to control the virus and protect the liver, while others may not. Regular blood tests and check-ups will show what is best for you. It is important to keep attending your appointments so your health is monitored and you get the support your body needs.

**Q. If hepatitis B can sometimes clear on its own, does that mean some people are immune/ can't get hepatitis B?**

Yes. Some adults who get hepatitis B and recover from the acute stage will clear the virus and develop natural immunity. This means their immune system has produced antibodies that protect them from getting hepatitis B again. The only way to know is with a blood test. If they are not immune, they can get the course of hepatitis B vaccine, which protects them from getting the virus.

**Q. What medicines might I take for hepatitis B, and what do they do?**

Most people who need treatment take antiviral tablets such as tenofovir or entecavir. These medicines help suppress the virus and protect your liver from damage. Your specialist will decide if you need them based on your blood tests and liver results.

**Q. Will I need extra tests from now on?**

Yes. You will have regular blood tests to check virus levels and scans to check your liver. These regular check-ups are an important part of staying well with hepatitis B. They help you and your healthcare team make confident decisions about your health and treatment over time.

**Q. How can I look after my health in between my hospital appointments?**

Most people don't need to do anything extra. However, maintaining a balanced diet can help support good liver health.

Aim for:

- Plenty of fruits and vegetables. These help protect liver cells. Examples include: leafy greens, carrots, beets, citrus fruits, tomatoes, broccoli and cabbage)
- Lean proteins, which support liver repair. These include fish, skinless poultry, beans, lentils, tofu and eggs.
- Whole grains, which help maintain energy and support metabolism. Examples are brown rice, oats, quinoa and whole-grain bread.
- Healthy fats such as avocados, nuts, seeds, olive oil, salmon and sardines rich in omega-3.

You should also:

- Keep a healthy weight.
- Get enough rest and manage stress
- Find support from family, friends or someone who is living with hepatitis B.
- Talk to your medical team before taking any supplements. Learn more about supplements and vitamins here: [https://britishlivertrust.org.uk/](https://britishlivertrust.org.uk/information-and-support/living-with-a-liver-condition/supplements-and-vitamins)



[information-and-support/living-with-a-liver-condition/supplements-and-vitamins](https://britishlivertrust.org.uk/information-and-support/living-with-a-liver-condition/supplements-and-vitamins)

Most people living with hepatitis B don't need to make big changes to their diet. For extra liver care, you might consider avoiding the following:

- Alcohol: Even small amounts can accelerate liver damage.
- Smoking.
- Sugary food and drinks: These may increase fat buildup in the liver. Avoid fizzy drinks, pastries, sweets or sweetened juices.
- Fatty and fried foods: These contribute to fatty liver, which worsens hepatitis B outcomes. Limit fried foods, fast food, fatty meats and meals with a lot of butter.
- Processed and high-sodium foods: Too much salt can make your body hold on to extra fluid, but this is mainly a concern for a small group of people with very advanced liver issues. You should also limit canned soups, processed meats, crisps and instant noodles.
- Nuts and grains with mould, as these can harm your liver.

### Q. Can I have a safe pregnancy if I have hepatitis B?

Yes. Many people with hepatitis B have healthy pregnancies and babies. Midwives will refer you to a specialist hepatitis team, and you will need to attend regular check-ups at each stage of your pregnancy.

### Q. Can I breastfeed if I have hepatitis B?

Yes, you can breastfeed. Hepatitis B does not pass through breast milk, especially if your baby had the hepatitis B vaccine at birth. If your nipples are cracked or bleeding, hepatitis B may pass through the blood. Stop breastfeeding from that side and get help from a healthcare professional. Start again when your nipples heal.

### Q. Will menopause affect my hepatitis B?

Menopause marks the natural stage in life when a woman's period stops for at least 12 months. It usually happens between the ages of 45-55. However, most people experience menopausal symptoms before their period stops, known as perimenopause. Hormonal changes like menopause and age-related health conditions may need extra attention. Speak with your doctor so they can support you and give advice that fits your needs as your body changes.

### Q. Will I need extra care as I get older?

Yes. It is important to keep going to your regular check-ups as you get older so your liver can be monitored, and any changes can be treated early. Your doctor can also tell you about new treatments and ways to protect your health.

## Section 2 Care for others

### Q. Can I pass hepatitis B to someone else?

Yes, but this can be prevented.

Your partner, children and other close household or sexual contacts should be offered the hepatitis B vaccine if you've been diagnosed. You should ask a GP or immunisation clinic to arrange it. In some cases, a special injection called Hepatitis B Immunoglobulin (HBIG) may also be recommended for quick, short-term protection after recent exposure. It should be given as soon as possible, ideally within 24 hours and no later

than 7 days after exposure. You can find out more by visiting:

<https://www.nhs.uk/vaccinations/hepatitis-b-vaccine>



Hepatitis B cannot be transmitted through:

- Breastmilk
- Sharing a meal
- Sharing water
- Using the same toilet
- Coughing or sneezing
- Holding hands
- Hugging or kissing



<b>How can hepatitis B be passed on?</b>	<b>What can be done to stop hepatitis B from being passed on to others?</b>
Sexual contact without using a condom	Using condoms when having sex.
Sharing needles or syringes	Not sharing injecting equipment like needles and syringes.
Getting injured by a used needle	Immediate first aid. Depending on the injury - vaccination and Hepatitis B Immunoglobulin Injection.
Contact with open sores or cuts	Immediate first aid. Cover cuts and open wounds. Depending on the injury – vaccination and Hepatitis B Immunoglobulin Injection.
From mother to child during childbirth	Course of hepatitis B vaccines starting within 24 hours of birth, and Hepatitis B Immunoglobulin if needed. Taking your treatment as prescribed.
Sharing personal items like razors or toothbrushes that may have blood on them	Not sharing personal items like toothbrushes and razors that may have blood on them.
Getting a tattoo or piercing with unsterilised equipment	Ensure tattoo parlours and beauty salons are licensed and inspected by Local Authorities. Check that the artists use single-use equipment, such as needles and ink pots, for every client. Reusable equipment such as grips and tubes should be sterilised.



**Q. I'm worried about telling my partner and family about my diagnosis. What should I do?**

It is normal to feel nervous. You can explain that hepatitis B is common; many people have it without knowing, and there is treatment and support. You can ask your doctor or nurse to help you explain it, or bring your partner to an appointment so they can ask questions too. If you need additional support and



information, you can also contact the British Liver Trust: <https://britishlivertrust.org.uk>

**Q. Is the hepatitis B vaccine safe for my partner, children and people I live with?**

Yes. The hepatitis B vaccine is very safe and is used all around the world. Around 90% of adults who complete the vaccine are fully protected against the virus. You need at least 3 doses of the vaccine, with at least a month between them, to give you the best protection. Like any vaccine, some people may get a sore arm or feel tired afterwards, but serious side effects are extremely rare. Speak to your GP about the vaccine. You can also learn more about the hepatitis B



vaccine here: <https://www.nhs.uk/vaccinations/hepatitis-b-vaccine>

**Q. Where can my family or close contacts get the vaccine?**

They can get the vaccine through their GP (doctor) or sexual health clinic. They should tell the GP they live with someone who has hepatitis B.

**Q. Is the vaccine free for family and close contacts?**

Yes. In the UK, the hepatitis B vaccine is free

on the NHS for close household and sexual contacts of someone with hepatitis B.

**Q. Can I still hug, kiss and share food with my family and friends?**

Yes. You cannot get hepatitis B through hugging, sharing food, sharing drinks, touching, or being close to someone. Every day contact at home is safe. (Kissing has a very low risk only if there is blood in the mouth, for example, from cuts or bleeding gums).

**Q. Do I need to stop having sex with my partner?**

No, you do not need to stop having sex. Hepatitis B can be passed through sex, so getting the vaccine is the best form of protection. You can also use condoms as a way of preventing transmission. If you or your partner need condoms, BHA for Equality offers free condom delivery



for ethnic minority communities. Order here: <https://thebha.org.uk>

**Q. Can I still try for a baby?**

Yes. You just need to talk to your doctor so they can check your liver and make sure you have the right care before and during pregnancy.

**Q. Will my baby get hepatitis B if I'm pregnant?**

In the UK, babies are protected by getting the hepatitis B vaccine soon after birth and follow-up doses and this is free on the NHS. Let your midwife or GP know as early as possible so they can arrange the baby's protection. Most babies do not get hepatitis B if the right steps are taken.

## Section 3 Your rights

### **Q. I missed my hospital appointment. What should I do?**

Call your hospital and ask to book again as soon as possible. Chronic hepatitis B can lead to liver damage, cirrhosis, or cancer if not monitored and treated properly. Regular visits help doctors see how strong the virus is and how your liver is working, so they can give you the right treatment.

### **Q. I am planning to travel to another country. What should I consider?**

Before you travel, check that your hepatitis B is under control and your latest blood tests are done. Take note of your medicines and your doctor's contact details. Pack enough medication for your trip, plus a little extra in case of delays. When buying travel insurance, choose one that covers your condition and emergency care where you are going.

### **Q. I'm an asylum seeker/ migrant. Will my hepatitis B diagnosis impact my immigration status?**

No. Having hepatitis B does not affect your asylum claim, immigration status, or chances of becoming a UK citizen. Healthcare and immigration decisions are separate, and you will not be refused status or citizenship because of a medical condition like hepatitis B.

### **Q. Who is allowed to know about my diagnosis?**

Your information is private. Only healthcare professionals involved in your care can access this information,

and they must follow strict NHS rules that protect patient information. It will not be shared with immigration services or employers, unless you give permission or there is a rare, serious safety reason.

### **Q. Do I have rights at work or school if I have hepatitis B?**

Yes. In the UK, hepatitis B is protected under the Equality Act, which means employers and schools cannot treat you unfairly because of your health. You do not have to tell classmates or colleagues, only relevant staff, if reasonable adjustments are needed.

### **Q. What if I'm treated unfairly?**

If you feel you are being treated unfairly because of hepatitis B, you can raise it with your employer or school through their complaints process. You can also get help from advice services like **ACAS** on **0300 123 1100** or **Citizens Advice** on **0800 144 8848**. Discrimination because of a health condition is not allowed under the Equality Act.

### **Q. I was diagnosed with hepatitis B in another country. How do I get help in the UK?**

If you already knew you had hepatitis B before coming to the UK, you can still get care and support here. Register with a GP (doctor) and tell them you have hepatitis B. They may arrange blood tests, check your liver health or refer you to a specialist clinic if needed. Bring some medical records if you have them, but it's okay if you don't.



Find a GP here:  
<https://www.nhs.uk/service-search/find-a-gp>

If you're an **international student**, register with your university GP or any local GP. Hepatitis B checks and treatment are free on the NHS for students, and your university health team can support you too.

If you're a **tourist or short-term visitor**, speak to a GP about your condition; you will get support regardless of your visa status.

If you're an **asylum seeker**, you can get free NHS care. Register with a GP and tell them your diagnosis. They may check your liver or refer you to a specialist clinic if needed. Hepatitis B does not affect your asylum claim.

If you are a **migrant or on a visa**, register with a GP. You can access NHS hepatitis B care, and your diagnosis will not affect your immigration status or visa.

### Q. Will I have to pay for my medication?

In England, hepatitis B medication may be free from the NHS depending on your circumstances. You can qualify for free NHS prescriptions if you meet certain conditions, for example, if you are under 16, aged 60 or over, pregnant, on certain benefits or if you have a medical exemption certificate.

You can check if you qualify for free NHS



prescriptions here:  
<https://www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/check-if-youre-eligible-help>

While hepatitis B itself does not usually qualify for a medical exemption certificate, you may still qualify for free prescriptions through one of the routes listed above.

If you are admitted to the hospital as an inpatient, all medications given to you during your stay are provided free of charge. Some clinics may also have other exceptions, so it is best to ask your doctor or nurse.

Most adults pay the standard NHS prescription charge of £9.90 (in 2025) for each item. If you take regular medicines like tenofovir or entecavir and don't qualify for free prescriptions, you can save money with a Prescription Prepayment Certificate (PPC). This lets you pay a set amount upfront, which is cheaper if you need your medication regularly.



You can buy your PPC here:  
<https://buy-prescription-prepayment-certificate.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/start>





**BHA For Equality**  
**www.thebha.org.uk**

**For further support:**

**Visit:** <https://thebha.org.uk/hep-b-voices/>

**Follow:** @bhaforequality

**E-Mail:** [pash@thebha.org.uk](mailto:pash@thebha.org.uk)

**Contact:** Your GP or local health team for confidential advice and testing

**Learn more**

- <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/hepatitis-b>
- <https://www.hepbcompanion.org>
- <https://britishlivertrust.org.uk/hepatitis-b-breaking-the-silence/>
- <https://britishlivertrust.org.uk/information-and-support/liver-conditions/hepatitis-b>
- <https://www.england.nhs.uk/mental-health/adults/nhs-talking-therapies>
- <https://thebha.org.uk/resources>
- <https://thebha.org.uk/hep-b-voices>

*Published January 2026*

This leaflet has been developed by **BHA For Equality** and informed by findings from community interviews of those living with Hepatitis B as part of our **#HepBVoices** project in partnership with **Manchester Foundation Trust (MFT)** and funded by **Gilead Sciences**. We would like to thank the various hospitals and clinics in Greater Manchester for their support.

Funded by

