

CHRONIC HEPATITIS B (HBV) COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS



1. *There is no treatment available for chronic HBV.*
 - **Chronic HBV can now be managed and treated with a number of effective medications that can suppress, slow or reverse the liver disease. All chronically infected patients need life-long monitoring, although many patients will never need actual treatment.**
2. *Healthy patients with chronic HBV (often called “carriers”) do not need regular medical follow-up.*
 - **Chronic hepatitis B is a dynamic disease. Inactive “carriers” can progress to cirrhosis or liver cancer (HCC) at any time. Continued screening should take place at regular intervals throughout the patient’s lifetime.**
3. *The hep B core antibody test (anti-HBc) must be ordered as part of the initial screening for chronic hepatitis B.*
 - **The anti-HBc test only indicates HBV infection at some undefined time in the past and can be open to varying interpretations. It is an optional test for the initial screening.**
4. *Normal or slightly elevated levels of liver enzymes indicate liver health and indicate that no action is necessary.*
 - **Hepatitis B can cause liver disease to progress even with normal or slightly elevated liver tests. The current major indication for HBV treatment is the patient’s viral load, as well as ongoing liver damage by liver biopsy in selected patients. Regular monitoring is always necessary.**
5. *Patients from countries with high HBV prevalence can wait until age 40 before being screened.*
 - **Patients born in countries with high rates of chronic HBV should be screened as early as possible. They have had the virus active in their liver since birth or early childhood and could convert to active liver disease at any age.**
6. *The hepatitis B vaccine has limited value.*
 - **The hepatitis B vaccine is one of the safest and most effective vaccines available. ACIP recommends vaccinating anyone who wishes to be protected from HBV.**
7. *Hepatitis B vaccine prevents liver cancer and enhances healing in infected patients.*
 - **The hepatitis B vaccine prevents infection, and thereby cancer. There is no reason to vaccinate a patient who is already infected, or immune due to disease exposure.**
8. *Hepatitis B can be transmitted through casual contact.*
 - **Kissing, handshakes, hugs, food or water does not spread hepatitis B.**