HOW TO AVOID HEPATITIS B

Dear Dr Grace,
This talk of Hepatitis B has become scary. I am told it is worse than HIV and even kills faster. What causes it and what is the best ways of preventing it?

Rachel

Dear Rachel,
Hepatitis B is becoming a serious problem to Ugandans, with those in the north being the most affected. Hepatitis B is a serious liver infection caused by the hepatitis B virus (HBV).

In most cases, a person may have Hepatitis B but does not know it. It may take time for symptoms to appear.

This virus can be spread through contact with the blood and body fluids of infected persons through:

Having sex with an infected person without protection.

Sharing sharp objects such as needles, tattooing, razors and toothbrushes with an infected person. This virus can survive outside the body for three days, so be careful when sharing sharp objects.

A mother who has the virus can also pass it onto her baby during delivery. That is the reason why we recommend that pregnant women get tested for hepatitis B and if she is found with the virus, the baby can be prevented from getting the infection.

Hepatitis B is not like HIV because there is a vaccine for it, however, there is no cure for the condition. If you are infected, taking certain precautions can help to prevent spreading of the virus to others.

Symptoms of hepatitis B

Signs and symptoms of hepatitis B range from mild to severe. They usually appear about one to four months after one has been infected, although they could see them as early as two weeks after infection. Some people, especially children, may not have any symptoms.

Some of the signs that one has Hepatitis B include:

- Abdominal pain
- Dark urine
- Fever
- Joint pain
- Loss of appetite
- Nausea and vomiting
- Weakness and fatigue
- Yellowing of the skin and whites of one's eyes (jaundice)



Prevention

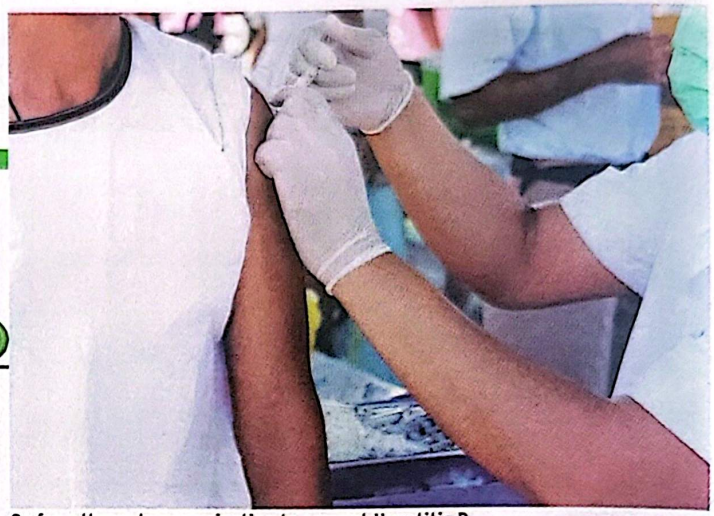
The best way to prevent hepatitis B is by vaccinating. The vaccine is given as three or four injections over a six-month period. A person cannot acquire the virus after vaccination.

The hepatitis B vaccine is recommended for:

- Newborns
- Children and adolescents not vaccinated at birth
- Those who work or live in a centre for people who are disabled
- People who live with someone who has hepatitis B
- Healthcare workers, emergency workers and others who come into contact with blood
- Anyone who has a sexually transmitted infection, including HIV
- People who have multiple sexual partners
- A sexual partners of someone who has hepatitis B
- People with chronic liver disease
- People planning to travel to an area of the world with a high hepatitis B infection rate

Other ways to reduce your risk include

- Know the HBV status of any sexual partner.



Go for a three-dose vaccination to prevent Hepatitis B

- Be cautious about body piercing and tattooing. If you get a piercing or tattoo, look for a reputable shop. Ask about how the equipment is cleaned. Ensure that the employees use sterile needles. If you cannot get answers, look for another shop.
- Ask about the hepatitis B vaccine before you travel. If you are traveling to a region where hepatitis B is common, ask your doctor about the hepatitis B vaccine in advance.
- Keep your body active and strong if you have chronic Hepatitis B. This can be through eating a balanced diet and doing physical exercises. Take some time to do yoga. This is works well to give energy to our internal organs.

If you have energy do simple exercise to help your body flush out toxins. You can do a simple walk for 30 minutes.

Since Hepatatis B affects the powerhouse (liver) of the body, most people with the disease suffer from low energy or fatigue and failure for the liver to detoxify foods. Therefore, it is important to have a diet rich in energy and that can easily be broken down in the liver.

It is important to give patients a lot of water to flush out any toxins, more whole grain foods like brown rice, sorghum, plenty of fruits, vegetables and proteins from legumes (beans).

Limit on saturated fats, especially from dairy products and fatty snacks. Limit cakes, sweet bread, biscuits, chocolate and other sweety foods. Limit the number of eggs eaten a week to at least three.

Completely avoid alcohol.

Dr. Grace Nambatya Kyeyune is a doctor in medicinal chemistry. Got any inquiries about nutrition for her, send an email to: sundayxtra@newvision.co.ug



The easiest dish to prepare