

Hypertension ups retinopathy risk with HCV treatment

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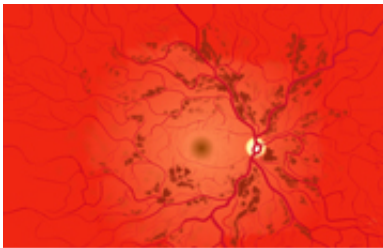


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For patients with hepatitis C virus treated with pegylated interferon alpha and ribavirin, retinopathy occurs frequently, especially in those with hypertension, according to a study published in the August issue of *Hepatology*.

(HealthDay) -- For patients with hepatitis C virus (HCV) treated with pegylated interferon alpha (PegIFN α) and ribavirin, retinopathy occurs frequently, especially in those with hypertension, according to a study published in the August issue of *Hepatology*.

Stela Vujosevic, M.D., from IRCCS in Rome, and colleagues examined the frequency and clinical significance of retinopathy in 97 consecutive HCV patients treated with PegIFN α and ribavirin. Ophthalmologic examination was performed before therapy initiation (baseline), at three and six months (3T and 6T) of therapy, and three months after the end of therapy (3ET).

The researchers found that 55.7 percent of patients were treated with PegIFN α 2a and 44.3 percent were treated with PegIFN α 2b. Retinopathy developed in 30.9 percent of patients. Age, metabolic syndrome, hypertension, cryoglobulinemia, and preexisting intraocular lesions at baseline were significantly associated with retinopathy during treatment. Hypertension was the only variable independently associated with PegIFN α -associated retinopathy on multivariate analysis (hazard ratio, 4.99). Retinopathy was significantly more frequent in patients with hypertension versus those without hypertension, at all time points (18.5 versus 5.7 percent at baseline; 48.1 versus 15.7 percent at 3T; 68.0 versus 19.1 percent at 6T; 32.0 versus 6.2 percent at 3ET). Compared with thyroid-stimulating hormone screening, screening for PegIFN α -associated retinopathy was deemed cost-effective.

"Retinopathy is frequent during treatment with PegIFN α and ribavirin, especially in hypertensive patients, who may develop serious complications," the authors write.

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