



Hep C Help

January 1, 2003 By [Tim Murphy](#)

If you're tired of feeling like a human pin cushion from thrice-weekly injections of alpha interferon to treat hep C, here's good news: In October, the FDA approved Pegasys, Roche's new "pegylated" interferon, which controls C in nearly four out of 10 patients. While Schering-Plough markets a near-identical version as Peg-Intron, experts such as Jules Levin, the National AIDS Treatment Advocacy Project's ED and a 19-year coinfection vet, give a slight edge to Pegasys. What's the diff? Peg-Intron is a powder (add water), dosing is weight-based and it may be a bit tougher to tolerate than Pegasys, which is already a liquid and has standardized dosing.

The "pegylation" process adds a chemical tail to the interferon, allowing the med to stay in your blood longer and at more consistent levels -- and allowing you to stick it to you just once a week. Alas, the tail has not whipped interferon's famous "flu from hell" symptoms, but many hep Cers report that they are diminished.

Meantime, a posse of top activists penned a protest to the Swiss giant, slamming its new drug's "let-'em-eat-cake" price tag: At \$13,963 for a year's treatment, the Pegasys price tops Peg-Intron by some \$800. After "work[ing] with the FDA to clear the path for approval," the letter reads, "we experience this as betrayal." To its credit, Roche is offering 12 weeks of Pegasys -- long enough to see if the drug works for you -- free to the first 15,000 to apply. Ask your doc to call 877.PEGASYS.

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