

Alcoholic liver disease

Liver is an organ that processes food we eat, stores energy and provides the body with a healthy immune system.

Drinking too much alcohol can lead to three types of liver conditions - **fatty liver, hepatitis and liver 'scarring' (cirrhosis)**. Any, or all, of these conditions can occur at the same time in the same person.

Fatty liver

A build-up of fat occurs within liver cells in most people who regularly drink heavily. In itself, fatty liver is not usually serious and does not cause symptoms. Fatty liver will usually reverse if you stop drinking heavily. However, in some people the fatty liver progresses and develops into hepatitis.

Alcoholic hepatitis

Hepatitis means inflammation of the liver. The inflammation can range from mild to severe.

- Mild hepatitis may not cause any symptoms. The only indication of inflammation may be an abnormal level of liver chemicals (enzymes) in the blood, which can be detected by a blood test. However, in some cases the hepatitis becomes persistent (chronic), which can gradually damage the liver and eventually cause cirrhosis.
- A more severe hepatitis tends to cause symptoms such as: Feeling sick (nausea), Yellowing of the skin and the whites of the eyes (jaundice), caused by a high level of bilirubin, sometimes, pain over the liver.
- A very severe bout of alcoholic hepatitis can quickly lead to liver failure. This can cause deep jaundice, blood clotting problems, confusion, coma and bleeding into the guts. It is often fatal.

Alcoholic cirrhosis

Cirrhosis is a condition where normal liver tissue is replaced by scar tissue (fibrosis). The scarring tends to be a gradual process. The scar tissue affects the normal structure and regrowth of liver cells. Liver cells become damaged and die as scar tissue gradually develops. So, the liver gradually loses its ability to function well. The scar tissue can also affect the blood flow through the liver which can cause back pressure in the blood vessels which bring blood to the liver.

Cirrhosis can happen from many causes other than alcohol - for example, persistent viral hepatitis and some hereditary and metabolic diseases. If you have another persistent liver disease and drink heavily, you are likely to increase your risk of developing cirrhosis.

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Tests done to pinpoint the diagnosis and determine disease severity include:

- Complete blood count (CBC)
- Liver biopsy
- Liver function tests
- Coagulation studies

Tests to rule out other diseases include:

- Abdominal CT scan
- Blood tests for other causes of liver disease
- Ultrasound of the abdomen

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Some things you can do to help take care of your liver disease are:

- Avoid alcohol.
- Eat a healthy diet that is low in salt.
- Get vaccinated for diseases such as influenza, hepatitis A and hepatitis B, and pneumococcal pneumonia.
- **Do not self medicate** - Follow the instructions on all medications and do not use over-the-counter drugs. **Check with your doctor before using any herbal remedies, muscle boosting powders, as not all such products are safe.**

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- Avoid eating fried and fast food
- Avoid cold-drinks.
- Limit cakes, chocolates, sweets
- Eat plenty of green vegetables
- Eat lean meats & small fish
- Eat legumes (beans, chickpeas or lentils)
- Avoid alcohol
- Quit smoking