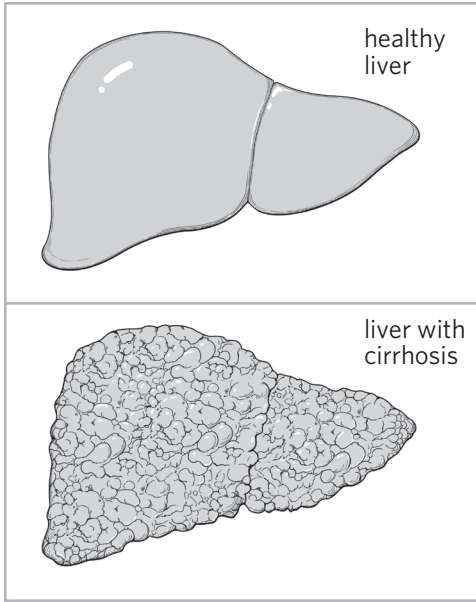


# Liver Disease



## **Your liver is one of the largest and most important organs in your body.**

It sits under your rib cage on the right side of your abdomen. Your liver's main job is to clean your blood and remove toxins, or harmful substances, from your body. This helps you fight infection and stay healthy. Your liver also helps you digest food, absorb nutrients and store energy.

Certain viruses, drinking too much alcohol, and using drugs can hurt your liver. To prevent liver disease, get screened and take steps to keep your liver healthy and prevent liver problems.

## **Causes of Liver Disease**

The American Liver Foundation estimates that one in 10 Americans is affected by liver disease. The most common causes of liver disease are:

- **Obesity**—Being overweight can cause extra fat to build up in your liver. Extra fat can cause inflammation in your liver.
- **Drinking too much alcohol**—Alcohol abuse is a main cause of liver damage. Heavy drinking can cause cirrhosis, or inflammation and scarring of the liver. Cirrhosis is a major risk factor for liver cancer.
- **Hepatitis B**—This virus can be passed from person to person through blood or bodily fluids (from your penis or vagina). You can get it from having unprotected sex with someone who has hepatitis B. Hepatitis B is a major risk factor for liver cancer.
- **Hepatitis C**—This virus can be passed from person to person through blood. You can get it from sharing drug needles or from having unprotected sex with someone who has hepatitis C.

## **What Happens When You Have Liver Disease**

Liver disease means your liver is damaged and doesn't work as well as it should. When your liver is damaged, it swells, or becomes inflamed. Inflammation that happens over time can scar your liver. This is called cirrhosis.

If you have cirrhosis or other liver damage and do not get treatment, your liver will start to lose its ability to do its job to keep you healthy.

### **Talk to your doctor about liver disease if you have any of the following symptoms:**

- severe pain or swelling in your abdomen
- itchy skin
- pale, bloody or very dark stools
- fatigue
- loss of appetite and nausea
- your skin and the whites of your eyes have a yellow tint (jaundice)

## **Screening for Liver Disease**

It's important to get screened for liver disease because you might not have symptoms of liver damage in its early stages.

Talk to your doctor about your risk of liver disease. Get screened if you have multiple sexual partners and do not always use safer sex practices. And get screened if you think you've been exposed to the hepatitis virus.



To learn more, visit:

- **American Liver Foundation**  
[www.liverfoundation.org](http://www.liverfoundation.org)
- **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention**  
[www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)

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Screenings for liver disease include:

- **Blood test**—This is the most common screening for liver disease.
- **Imaging**—Your doctor will use radiological imaging, which takes pictures of the inside of your body, to look for problems in your liver.
- **Biopsy**—Your doctor takes a sample of liver tissue to test for liver problems.

If you have liver disease, your doctor will talk to you about treatment options. These may include medicines, surgery or, in some cases, a liver transplant.

## How to Prevent Liver Disease

There are several things you can do to keep your liver healthy and help prevent liver disease:

- **Limit how much alcohol you drink, or don't drink at all.** Men should have no more than two drinks per day, and women should have no more than one drink per day.
- **Maintain a healthy weight through diet and exercise.** Eat a low-fat, high-fiber diet full of vegetables, fruits, legumes and whole grains. And exercise for 30 minutes at least five days a week.
- **Don't smoke.** The chemicals in cigarettes can harm your liver. Visit [www.smokefree.gov](http://www.smokefree.gov) for help quitting.
- **Use condoms** and safer sex practices to reduce the risk of getting hepatitis.
- **Talk to your doctor** about getting the hepatitis B vaccine if you are at risk.
- **Take medicine exactly as your doctor prescribes.** Some medicines, especially if you take them with alcohol, can damage your liver. Read medicine labels carefully, and talk to your doctor about all the medicines you take.

## Remember:

- Your liver is an important organ that cleans your blood, stores energy and helps digest food.
- Liver disease means your liver has become inflamed and scarred and can't work like it needs to.
- Get screened for liver disease because early liver damage doesn't always have symptoms.
- Limit the amount of alcohol you drink, take medicine as prescribed, and maintain a healthy weight.