

HEALTH IN OUR HANDS!

The Arkansas State University Wellness Program Newsletter
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Liver Disease

Overview

The liver is an organ about the size of a football that sits just under your rib cage on the right side of your abdomen. The liver helps us to digest our food and able to rid our body of toxic elements in our blood.

Liver disease occurs when our liver fails to function properly or stop functioning all together. There are over 100 known forms of liver disease caused by a variety of factors that can affect anyone from infants to adults. The most frequent causes of liver disease include viral hepatitis, obesity, alcohol, genetics, autoimmune disease, drugs and toxins, and cancer.

Signs and Symptoms

The following is a list of signs and symptoms associated with liver disease:

- Skin and eyes that appear yellowish (jaundice)
- Abdominal pain and swelling

- Swelling in the legs and ankles
- Itchy skin
- Dark urine color
- Pale stool color, or bloody or tar-colored stool
- Chronic fatigue
- Nausea or vomiting
- Loss of appetite
- Tendency to bruise easily
- Exposure to certain chemicals or toxins
- Diabetes
- Obesity
- High levels of triglycerides in your blood

Complications

Complications of liver disease vary, depending on the cause of your liver problems. Untreated liver disease may progress to liver failure, a life-threatening condition.

If you have any of these signs or symptoms, it is best to consult your family physician for further questions or concerns.

Risk Factors

Factors that may increase your risk of liver disease include:

- Heavy alcohol use
- Injecting drugs using shared needles
- Tattoos or body piercings
- Blood transfusion before 1992
- Exposure to other people's blood and body fluids
- Unprotected sex

What is Cirrhosis?

Cirrhosis is scarring of the liver. Scar tissue forms because of injury or long-term disease. Scar tissue cannot do what healthy liver tissue does - make protein, help fight infections, clean the blood, help digest food and store energy. Cirrhosis can lead to

- Easy bruising or bleeding, or nosebleeds

- Swelling of the abdomen or legs
- Extra sensitivity to medicines
- High blood pressure in the vein entering the liver
- Enlarged veins called varices in the esophagus and stomach. Varices can bleed suddenly.
- Kidney failure
- Jaundice
- Severe itching
- Gallstones

A small number of people with cirrhosis get liver cancer.

Treatment

Treatment for liver disease depends on your diagnosis. Some liver problems can be treated with lifestyle modifications, such as stopping alcohol use or losing weight, typically as part of a medical program that includes careful monitoring of liver function. Other liver problems may be treated with medications or may require surgery.

Treatment for liver disease that causes liver failure may ultimately require a liver transplant.

Prevention

To prevent liver disease:

- **Drink alcohol in moderation.** For healthy adults, that means up to one drink a day for women of all ages and men older

than age 65, and up to two drinks a day for men age 65 and younger.

- **Get vaccinated.** If you're at increased risk of contracting hepatitis or if you've already been infected with any form of the hepatitis virus, talk to your doctor about getting the hepatitis A and hepatitis B vaccines.
- **Use medications wisely.** Take prescription and nonprescription drugs only when needed and only in recommended doses. Don't mix medications and alcohol. Talk to your doctor before mixing herbal supplements or prescription or nonprescription drugs.
- **Avoid contact with other people's blood and body fluids.** Hepatitis viruses can be spread by accidental needle sticks or improper cleanup of blood or body fluids.
- **Take care with aerosol sprays.** Make sure the room is ventilated, and wear a mask when spraying insecticides, fungicides, paint and other toxic chemicals. Always follow the manufacturer's instructions.
- **Protect your skin.** When using

insecticides and other toxic chemicals, wear gloves, long sleeves, a hat and a mask.

- **Maintain a healthy weight.** Obesity can cause nonalcoholic fatty liver disease.

References

- <http://www.liver.ca/liver-disease/>
- <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/cirrhosis.html>
- <http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/liver-problems/basics/definition/con-20025300>

Other News:

**If you have any suggestions for newsletter topics, please contact Dean Susan Hanrahan at hanrahan@astate.edu.

The Arkansas State University Employee Wellness Newsletter is published monthly during the academic year by the College of Nursing and Health Professions. Health questions can be addressed to Dean Susan Hanrahan, Ph.D., ext. 3112 or hanrahan@astate.edu. Produced by Kelsie Clark, graduate student in the College of Nursing and Health Professions, Physical Therapy Program.