

Managing liver cirrhosis

Hepatology

Information for Patients

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What is liver cirrhosis?

The liver helps to fight infection and illness and removes toxins (poisons) from the body. Liver cirrhosis is a long-term (chronic) problem of your liver. It occurs when liver tissue is destroyed and replaced by scar tissue (fibrosis). The scarring stops the liver working properly.

Tackling the cause of cirrhosis as soon as possible is likely to prevent your liver from getting worse, and often the liver will start to work better as well.

What causes liver cirrhosis?

There are many causes of 'scarring' of the liver (cirrhosis). In the UK the most common causes are:

- build up of excess fat (non-alcoholic fatty liver disease (NAFLD)) which can lead to a severe form of inflammation (non-alcoholic steatohepatitis (NASH)). The most common causes of this are obesity and type 2 diabetes.
- infection with the hepatitis B or C virus.
- heavy drinking of alcohol.

What are the signs that the liver is not working well?

- Yellowing of your skin and eyes (jaundice).
- A build up of fluid in your tummy or legs (ascities).

**Health information and support is available at www.nhs.uk
or call 111 for non-emergency medical advice**

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- Vomiting blood (varicies).
- Confusion or trouble thinking clearly due to a build up of toxins in the blood (hepatic encephalopathy).

How can I help my liver work better?

Diet:

Good nutrition is an important factor in supporting your liver to function, as your body may need more calories each day than a person with a healthier liver. It is advised that you try to have regular meals with snacks in between meals, so a “little and often” approach to eating.

A good diet would include some of each of the following:

- Carbohydrates - good source of energy (bread, potato, breakfast cereals, pasta and rice).
- Protein - this is needed to build and repair body tissue e.g. muscles (meat and poultry, fish, eggs, pulses, meat alternatives, dairy and dairy alternatives).
- Fruit and vegetables - good source of vitamins, minerals and fibre.
- Fatty and sugary foods - these should only form a small part of your diet.
- Bedtime snack - it is important that you have a snack with some carbohydrates (about 50g of carbohydrate is recommended) for your body to use before you go to bed, as it is a long time until breakfast.

Reducing salt - as part of a healthy diet we should aim to reduce the amount of salt we eat. This means limiting the amount of salt added during cooking and at the table. If you regularly eat processed foods e.g. ready meals or tinned products, you should reduce your intake or choose a brand which states low salt or has no added salt.

You can find more information on eating well from leaflet 963 ‘Eating enough to support your recovery at home’. You can view it here on our online store or ask a member of staff for a copy: <https://yourhealth.leicestershospitals.nhs.uk/library/csi/dietetics/1160-eating-enough-to-support-your-recovery-at-home>

If you have noticed any recent weight loss and are concerned, ask your GP or consultant to refer you to a dietician for further assessment and advice.

Alcohol:

For people with liver disease it is very important not to drink alcohol. You can get help and support to stop from an organisation called Turning Point. This can be done while you are in hospital or at home by yourself.

You can contact Turning Point on 0330 303 6000 or via their website: <http://wellbeing.turning-point.co.uk/leicestershire/>

Exercise:

If you have had a hospital stay because of liver damage, it can take time to build up your strength again. It is important to try and do some form of exercise for 30 minutes a day, but this will vary depending on your strength levels.

Exercise is also important as being overweight means you are more likely to build up fatty deposits in the liver, which is what leads to scarring.

Bowels/ preventing constipation:

It is important to prevent constipation as this can lead to drowsiness, confusion and potentially hepatic encephalopathy due to toxins building up in your body.

You should aim to open your bowels 3 to 4 times a day. To help you do this you may need laxatives; these are often given on discharge from hospital but if not please speak to your GP.

Medicines, supplements and vaccines:

- Take your medication exactly as directed.
- Talk with your GP before taking vitamins, over-the-counter medicines or herbal supplements. Some herbal supplements may be toxic to the liver. Painkillers which are non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) such as ibuprofen, can harm the liver if you have cirrhosis.
- Ask your GP about getting vaccines for the viruses hepatitis A and hepatitis B, as they can cause liver disease.

How will the hospital team help me?

We are here to support the symptoms of liver cirrhosis and also monitor any changes in your liver disease. If fluid builds up in your tummy and is causing you to be short of breath, uncomfortable or tense you can contact the hospital to come in for an elective drain (paracentesis). Contact us on 0116 258 6480 or 0116 258 7296 - Monday to Friday, 9am to 4pm.

The Hepatology Team will want to see you on a regular basis to check how you and your liver is doing. This will involve:

- follow-up with the Hepatology Team on a regular basis.
- regular blood tests which can be done at your GP surgery or the hospital.
- an ultrasound scan of your liver at regular intervals, as people with cirrhosis are at risk of liver cancer (hepatocellular carcinoma).
- an endoscopy procedure to check swollen veins (varices) in your digestive tract.
- a DEXA scan to check bone density every 3 years, as people with cirrhosis may develop thinning of the bones (osteopenia / osteoporosis).

When to seek medical help

If you have the following symptoms you should urgently seek medical advice as these can be signs that your liver is struggling:

- Fever.
- Shortness of breath (SOB).
- Vomiting blood.
- Dark/ black tarry poo (stools).
- Periods of mental confusion or drowsiness.
- Swelling of your tummy.

Useful websites and support groups

- British Liver Trust:
- <https://britishlivertrust.org.uk/>
- <https://britishlivertrust.org.uk/information-and-support/support-for-you/support-groups/>
- NHS website: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/Cirrhosis/>
- Patient Info: <https://patient.info/digestive-health/abnormal-liver-function-tests-leaflet/cirrhosis>

Contact details

Contact your GP, or if unavailable call the NHS helpline on 111, or Ward 43 at the Leicester Royal Infirmary on 0116 258 6239.

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على هذه المعلومات بلغة أخرى، الرجاء الاتصال على رقم الهاتف الذي يظهر في الأسفل

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