

“What is liver cirrhosis?”



The liver is one of the most important organs in the body. It is essential in the digestion of food and removing toxic substances in the body. It is responsible for metabolizing and processing drugs, producing several other important substances such as bile and proteins essential for bodily functions.¹

The liver heals itself when it gets injured. Liver injury comes in the form of excessive alcohol consumption, disease, or long-term use of certain medicines. Each time the liver heals itself, scar tissue forms in the injured site. Scar tissues make certain areas of the liver less efficient in doing its job. As more and more injuries happen to the liver, more scar tissues will be formed. Late-stage scarring of the liver is called **cirrhosis**. Advanced stages of cirrhosis are life-threatening.²

Liver damage caused by cirrhosis is generally irreversible. If liver cirrhosis is diagnosed early, the damage can be minimized and treated. Unfortunately, the damage is rarely reversed.

Oftentimes, cirrhosis presents no signs or symptoms until the damage has been widespread. Therefore, it is recommended that you do regular checkups and check your liver health. When symptoms of cirrhosis appear, they include the following²:

- Fatigue

- Easily bleeding or bruising
- Loss of appetite
- Nausea
- Swelling in your legs, feet, or ankles (edema)
- Weight loss
- Itchy skin
- Yellow discoloration in the skin and eyes (jaundice)
- Fluid accumulation in your abdomen (ascites)
- Spider-like blood vessels on your skin
- Redness in the palms of the hands
- For women, absence or loss of periods not related to menopause
- For men, loss of sex drive, breast enlargement (gynecomastia), or testicular atrophy
- Confusion, drowsiness, and slurred speech (hepatic encephalopathy)

You can reduce your risk of developing liver cirrhosis by making some lifestyle changes. This includes avoiding drinking too much alcohol as it is a major risk factor. Conditions such as diabetes, obesity, viral hepatitis can also increase one's risk of contracting cirrhosis.

If you suspect you might be at risk of liver cirrhosis, you can ask your healthcare provider to perform a physical exam to learn more about your health. They will examine you physically and observe any symptoms such as spider-like blood vessels on the skin, yellowing of the skin or the whites of eyes, bruises, redness, etc. Blood tests may also be requested to look for abnormal levels in blood composition.

There is no cure for cirrhosis, and permanent damage will be done to the liver. Depending on the cause, actions may be taken to keep it from getting worse, including totally stopping drinking alcohol, avoiding liver-stressing medication, and treating chronic hepatitis (if present).³

It is the most common reason in adults for requiring liver transplants. Liver transplants are an option for mitigating chronic liver disease or when liver failure occurs very quickly.⁴

References:

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