Hepatic encephalopathy is a brain disorder that develops in some individuals with liver disease. Hepatic encephalopathy is a complex disorder that encompasses a spectrum or continuum of disease that ranges from a subtle condition with no outward signs or symptoms to a severe form that can cause serious, life-threatening complications. Symptoms are related to progressive dysfunction of the brain and may include personality changes, intellectual impairment, impaired memory and loss of consciousness (coma). Hepatic encephalopathy can occur in individuals with acute or chronic liver (hepatic) disease or in individuals whose liver is bypassed by a portosystemic shunt (with no liver disease present). A portosystemic shunt is an abnormal passageway that allows blood from the gastrointestinal tract to bypass the liver. They can be present at birth (congenital) or acquired during life. Hepatic encephalopathy is caused when toxins that are normally cleared from the body by the liver accumulate in the blood, eventually traveling to the brain. Many of the symptoms of hepatic encephalopathy are reversible when promptly detected and treated. A diagnosis of hepatic encephalopathy may be suspected in some individuals with liver disease based upon identification of characteristic symptoms, a detailed patient history, a thorough clinical evaluation and a variety of specialized tests that are used to rule out other conditions. Such tests may include a complete blood count, liver function tests, tests that evaluate serum ammonia levels, and an electroencephalogram, which is a test that measures the electrical activity of the brain, may be useful in detecting encephalopathy. Specialized imaging techniques such as magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) and computed tomography (CT) scans may be used to rule out other conditions affecting the brain such as tumors.