

# Liver Cancer: Risk Factors



## What is a risk factor?

A risk factor is anything that may increase your chance of having a disease. Risk factors for a certain type of cancer might include smoking, diet, family history, or many other things. The exact cause of someone's cancer may not be known. But risk factors can make it more likely for a person to have cancer.

Things you should know about risk factors for cancer:

- Risk factors can increase a person's risk, but they don't always cause the disease.
- Some people with risk factors never get cancer. Other people with cancer have few or no known risk factors.
- Some risk factors are very well known. But there's ongoing research about risk factors for many types of cancer.

Some risk factors, such as family history, may not be in your control. But others may be things you can change. Knowing about risk factors can help you make choices that might lower your risk. For example, if an unhealthy diet is a risk factor, you may choose to eat healthy foods. If excess weight is a risk factor, you may decide to lose weight.

## Who is at risk for liver cancer?

Anyone can get liver cancer. But there are some factors that can increase your risk for it. These include:

- **Chronic viral hepatitis.** Worldwide, chronic hepatitis B virus (HBV) and hepatitis C virus (HCV) infections are the biggest risk factors for liver cancer. These viruses can cause inflammation that can lead to scarring or cirrhosis.
- **Alcohol abuse.** People who drink a lot of alcohol are at increased risk for cirrhosis. This raises their risk for liver cancer.
- **Obesity.** People who are very overweight are at higher risk for liver cancer.
- **Cirrhosis.** People who have scarring of their liver, whether it's from hepatitis, alcohol use, or some other cause, have a higher risk for liver cancer.
- **Type 2 diabetes.** People with type 2 diabetes have a higher risk for liver cancer. This might be because they tend to be overweight or obese.
- **Exposure to certain chemicals.** Chemicals that have been linked to liver cancer include arsenic in drinking water, vinyl chloride, thorium dioxide (Thorotrast), and anabolic steroids. They also include aflatoxins. Aflatoxins are made by a mold that can grow on stored grains and nuts.
- **Smoking.** People who smoke have a higher risk for liver cancer.

## What are your risk factors?

Talk with your healthcare provider about your risk factors for liver cancer. Ask what you can do about them. Some risk factors might not be under your control. But there are some things you can do that might help lower your risk:

- Don't do activities that increase your risk for HBV and HCV infection. Don't use intravenous drugs, don't have many sex partners, and don't handle human blood or fluids without protection. All of these increase your risk of getting these viruses. Also ask your healthcare provider if you should get the

hepatitis B vaccine. If you're at risk for HBV or HCV infection, ask your healthcare provider about getting tested. For people who are infected, medicines can often keep the infections in check or even cure them. This may lower your risk for liver cancer.

- Limit or stay away from alcohol. It's best not to drink alcohol. Men who drink should limit themselves to two drinks or fewer per day. Women who drink should limit themselves to one drink or fewer per day.
- Get to and stay at a healthy weight. Ask your healthcare provider for help if needed.
- Don't smoke. If you smoke, get help to quit.

If you have a high risk for liver cancer because of cirrhosis or other reasons, your healthcare provider may test you regularly for liver cancer. Blood tests and ultrasounds can be used to look for early signs of liver cancer. If you think you might be at high risk, talk with your healthcare provider.

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