

# Treating Cirrhosis



Cirrhosis is a condition where the liver is damaged. Scar tissue slowly replaces healthy tissue. This makes the liver stop working correctly. Treatment can sometimes slow or even stop liver scarring. Over time the liver is able to regrow (regenerate) itself. Follow your healthcare provider's instructions closely to get the most out of your treatment. And ask your family and friends for support.

## Making a treatment plan

You and your healthcare provider will decide on a treatment plan that's best for you. The plan may include 1 or more of these:

- **Not drinking alcohol.** Heavy alcohol use can damage the liver. Once the liver is damaged, even a small amount of alcohol can cause problems. You can prevent more liver damage if you stop all alcohol use.
- **Taking medicines.** You may need to take these to treat some causes of cirrhosis. These include infection or a bile duct blockage. For instance, hepatitis C can now be cured with medicine. And you may need medicine if your immune system is attacking the liver or bile ducts. Talk to your provider before taking common pain medicines if you have cirrhosis. These include acetaminophen. And they include nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) such as ibuprofen and naproxen.
- **Treating symptoms.** Cirrhosis can cause swelling in your stomach and legs. A low-salt diet can help ease this symptom. Stay under about 2,000 mg of sodium a day. Water pills (diuretics) may also be prescribed to help with swelling. Cirrhosis can also cause mental confusion. Medicines are used to treat this.
- **Eating healthy foods.**
- **Losing extra weight.** This is even more important if your cirrhosis is from nonalcoholic fatty liver disease (NAFLD) or nonalcoholic steatohepatitis (NASH). Cirrhosis from NAFLD or NASH is linked to excess weight or obesity. If you have NAFLD, weight loss and exercise can slow down liver damage.
- **Removing iron from your blood.** This may be done if your cirrhosis is caused by hemochromatosis. This condition occurs when too much iron builds up in the body. Your provider may remove extra iron from your blood.

Severe cases of cirrhosis may need special treatments. Your healthcare provider can discuss them with you.

## Vaccines

Be sure to ask your healthcare provider about advised vaccines. These include vaccines for viruses than can cause liver disease, such as hepatitis A and B.

## Don't drink alcohol

Alcohol use can destroy liver cells. If you have problems quitting alcohol, ask your provider for help with getting the support you need. They may be able to suggest treatment centers or local groups that can help you stop drinking.

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