

LIVER CIRRHOSIS

Cirrhosis of the liver is a type of [liver](#) damage where healthy cells are replaced by scar tissue. The liver is unable to perform its vital functions of metabolism, production of proteins, including blood clotting factors, and filtering of drugs and toxins.

Many people think that only drinking excessive amounts of alcohol causes liver cirrhosis. But there are a number of other ways that the liver can be damaged and lead to cirrhosis.

Depending on the cause, cirrhosis can develop over months or years. There is no cure. Treatment aims to halt liver damage, manage the symptoms and reduce the risk of complications, such as diabetes, osteoporosis (brittle bones), liver cancer and liver failure.

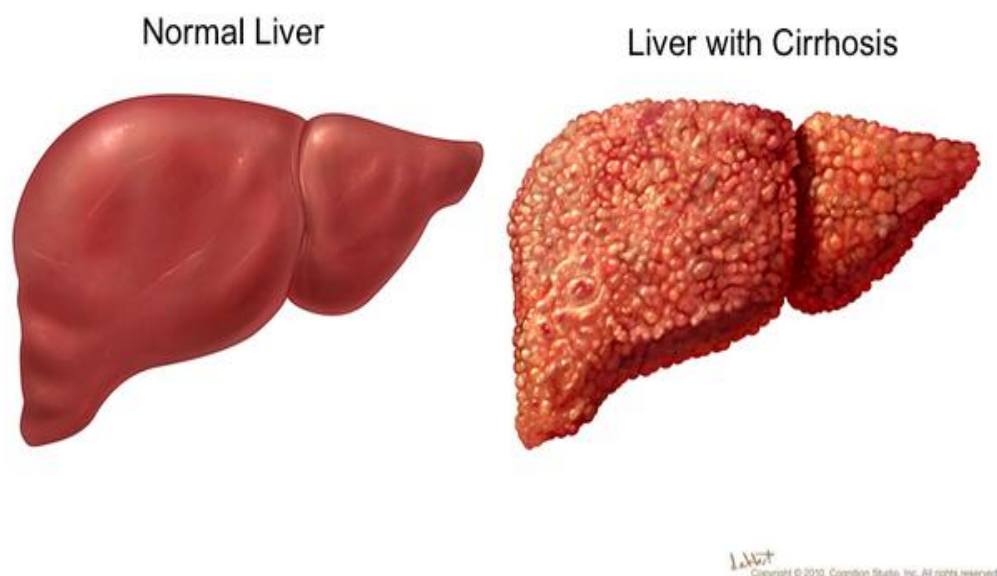
Symptoms depend on the severity of the cirrhosis, but may include:

- appetite loss
- nausea

- weight loss
- general tiredness
- spidery red veins on the skin (spider angiomas)
- easily bruised skin
- yellowing of the skin and eyes (jaundice)
- reddened palms (palmar erythema)
- itchy skin
- hair loss
- dark coloured urine
- fluid retention in the abdomen and legs
- internal bleeding presenting as dark-coloured stools or vomiting blood
- hormone disruptions that could cause a range of problems, including testicular atrophy (shrinking) and impotence in males or amenorrhoea (no periods) in women
- disturbed sleep patterns
- cognitive problems such as memory loss, confusion or concentration difficulties.

Causes of liver cirrhosis

Two of the most well-known causes of liver cirrhosis are long-term excessive alcohol consumption and [hepatitis C](#) virus infection. However, there are a number of other conditions that can also lead to liver damage and cirrhosis. In fact, non-alcoholic [fatty liver disease](#) ('fatty liver') is the most common cause of chronic liver disease in Australia. A small proportion of patients with fatty liver can also develop cirrhosis. Hepatitis B virus infection is an important cause of cirrhosis worldwide.



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Liver cirrhosis and fatty liver

Non-alcoholic fatty liver disease (NAFLD) is a condition where fat accumulates in the liver. It now affects about 20 per cent of Australians. It is becoming more common in children who are overweight or obese.

NAFLD is associated with conditions such as:

- obesity – 20 per cent of people with obesity have fatty liver disease
- high blood cholesterol and triglycerides
- type 2 diabetes.

NAFLD can lead to inflammation of the liver and the formation of scar tissue, a condition called non-alcoholic steatohepatitis (NASH), which can then lead to cirrhosis of the liver. NASH usually occurs in people who are obese, have diabetes or have high blood cholesterol and triglycerides, so controlling these conditions is recommended.