

The Anatomy of the Abdomen, Including the Liver in the Upper Right Quadrant

Why is the liver important?

The liver is the second largest organ in the body and is located under the rib cage in the upper right side of the abdomen. It performs hundreds of functions vital to health and well-being including regulation of metabolism, production of clotting proteins and blood detoxification.

What is cirrhosis?

Cirrhosis is a disease that scars the liver, mostly related to nonalcoholic fatty liver disease, alcohol misuse, or chronic Hepatitis B or C. Cirrhosis is among the 10 leading causes of death in the United States. Cirrhosis is an important cause of morbidity and mortality. It is the 12th leading cause of hospitalizations and death in the United States. Compensated cirrhosis means cirrhosis with no evidence of complications; decompensated cirrhosis means the development of liver complications.

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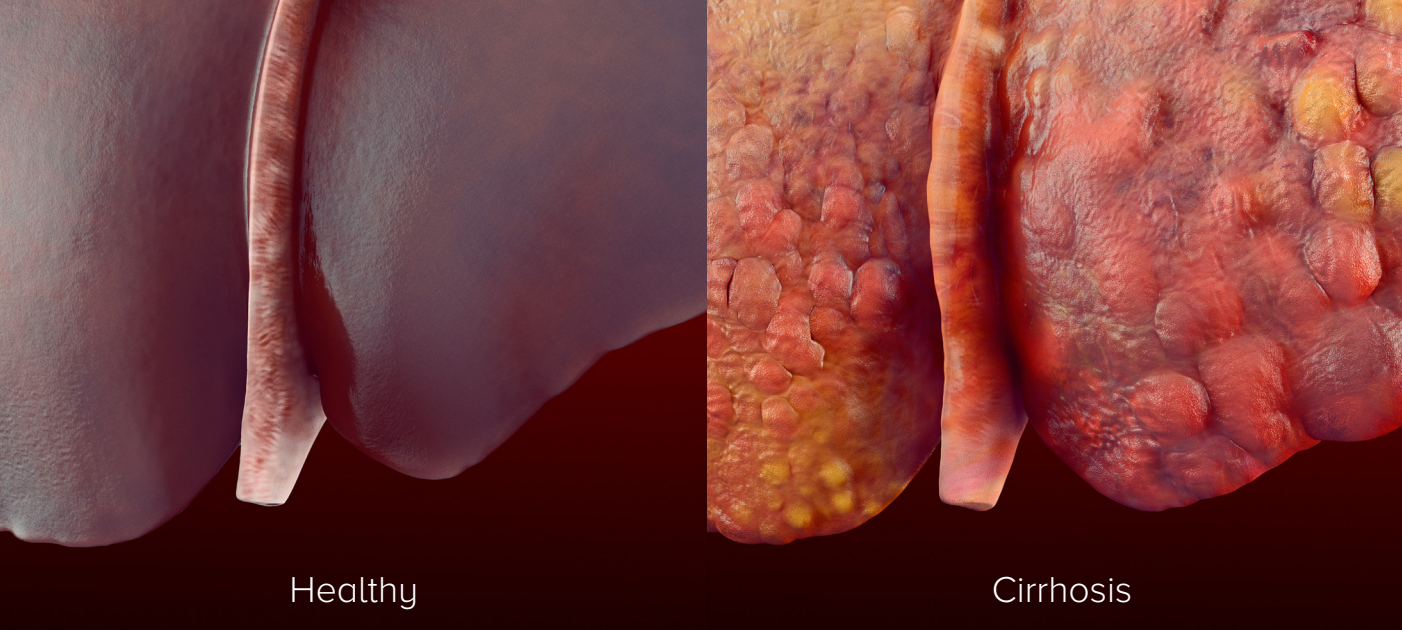
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What is **CIRRHOSIS?**



An Informational Guide
to Prevention, Diagnosis,
and Treatment Through
Lifestyle Changes.



Healthy

Cirrhosis

Fatty liver can cause cirrhosis

There are two types of fatty liver disease which have different causes but result in similar liver injuries. The first is **Alcoholic Fatty Liver Disease (AFLD)** and is caused by high alcohol consumption (>20 grams/20 milliliters per day). It is the earliest stage of alcoholic liver disease which may progress to the most severe stage, cirrhosis.

The second type is **Non-Alcoholic Fatty Liver Disease (NAFLD)** and occurs for reasons other than alcohol consumption. It is often associated with symptoms of insulin resistance (a condition affecting fat metabolism) **including obesity, Type 2 diabetes, hypertension and dyslipidemia.**

Other risk factors for fatty liver disease include some medications (such as corticosteroids, certain antidepressants and antipsychotics, Amiodarone and Methotrexate) **hepatitis infections, autoimmune or inherited liver disease, fast weight loss, and malnutrition.**

What are the symptoms?

Many patients have no symptoms for a long period of time. Symptoms can include swelling in the abdomen (ascites) or extremities, fluid buildup in the lungs, bleeding, bruising, shortness of breath, fatigue, yellowing of the skin or whites of the eyes (jaundice), mental confusion (encephalopathy), trouble sleeping or sleeping too much.

How is cirrhosis diagnosed?

Testing may include a liver biopsy (a needle is inserted into the liver and a piece of liver tissue is obtained and sent for pathology), blood tests, and liver imaging (ultrasound, CAT scan, and/or MRI).

Is cirrhosis curable?

Early detection is important as liver transplant may be an option. Some causes of cirrhosis can be treated; if possible identify and treat the underlying cause.

What can I do to prevent the disease from progressing?

- Create an exercise routine. Be active for at least 180 minutes per week, such as walking.
- Eat the Mediterranean Diet which consists of fruits and vegetables (5 servings daily), whole grains, beans and nuts. Replace butter with healthier fats, such as extra virgin olive oil.
- Avoid soda and other forms of refined sugar. Try and limit intake to 15 grams of fructose per day.
- Restrict salt intake, less than 2 grams daily.
- Water pills (diuretics) can help control ascites and lower extremity edema. Certain medications, called beta-blockers, can help reduce blood pressure in the liver.
- An upper endoscopy (EGD) every 2-3 years to monitor for gastric and/or esophageal varices.
- Watch your weight; if gaining weight or weight loss or swelling, report to your doctor.
- Obtain a bone density scan (DEXA scan), every two years. Adequate calcium and Vitamin D intake.
- Follow up at least quarterly with your primary care provider or a GI specialist to monitor the health of your liver.



Additional Resources:

- www.liverfoundation.org (American Liver Foundation)
- www.aasld.org (American Association for the Study of Liver Disease)
- www.patients.gi.org (American College of Gastroenterology)