

Cirrhosis



What Is Cirrhosis?

Cirrhosis is severe liver damage that causes scarring of the liver. In serious cases, the liver may stop working the way it should. This is dangerous because your liver does many important jobs. It removes harmful substances from your blood. It also helps turn what you eat and drink into energy and nutrients. Causes of cirrhosis include:

- Drinking too much alcohol
- Side effects of certain drugs
- Hepatitis B, hepatitis C, or other infections that affect the liver
- Fatty liver disease, which can be caused by being overweight or having diabetes
- Hemochromatosis, a condition that causes iron to build up in the liver



What Are the Warning Signs of Cirrhosis?

- Feeling tired or weak
- Loss of appetite and weight loss
- Yellowing of the eyes and skin (jaundice)
- Swelling in the stomach area or midsection
- Abnormal sleep, mood changes, or confusion
- Itchy skin
- Throwing up blood or having tar-like or bloody bowel movements



How Is Cirrhosis Diagnosed?

- Your doctor will ask questions about your medical history and symptoms and give you an exam.
- Your blood will be tested to check for possible causes of cirrhosis and your liver function.
- An ultrasound or other imaging test of your midsection may be needed.
- A biopsy may also be needed. This is a test that uses a needle to take a small amount of liver tissue.



How Is Cirrhosis Treated?

There is no cure for cirrhosis, but there are treatments available. These treatments can help slow liver damage. They can also help to reduce complications caused by cirrhosis.

- Treatment will depend on the main cause of cirrhosis.
- You should take steps to protect your liver from more damage. This includes getting all necessary vaccines. People with cirrhosis should not drink alcohol or take medicines

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that could harm the liver. This includes some over-the-counter pain killers (like acetaminophen).

- If damage becomes so severe that the liver can't do its normal jobs, you might need a liver transplant. A liver transplant replaces a damaged liver with a healthy liver. This is a major surgery that is only done when there are no other treatment options.



Questions for My Doctor

- How did I get cirrhosis?
- Is there a way to slow the damage to my liver?
- How should I change my diet if I have cirrhosis?
- How do I know that my treatment program is working?
- What will happen to me if my cirrhosis gets worse?
- Do I need any shots (vaccines)?
- What other lifestyle changes can I make to improve my health?
- Can I have a drink every now and then?



Bottom Line

- Cirrhosis causes severe damage and scarring of the liver. Cirrhosis can be caused by drinking too much alcohol, hepatitis, and fatty liver disease.
- It is important to diagnose and treat the causes of cirrhosis early, before the damage causes the liver to stop working.
- Cirrhosis cannot be reversed. Early treatment may stop damage from getting worse.
- Treatment will depend on the cause of cirrhosis. You should get all recommended vaccines and avoid alcohol and medicines that can damage the liver. A liver transplant may be needed if the liver cannot perform its normal functions.

For More Information

- **American Liver Foundation:** www.liverfoundation.org/abouttheliver/info/cirrhosis/
- **Medline Plus:** www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/cirrhosis.html
- **National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases:** <http://digestive.niddk.nih.gov/ddiseases/pubs/cirrhosis/index.aspx>

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