

Reference Notes

Cirrhosis of the Liver: An Overview

As the largest organ in the human body, the liver is comparable in size to a football and is located just below the ribs in the upper right abdomen. It weighs approximately three pounds and is soft and smooth when healthy.

Cirrhosis of the liver is a condition caused when normal liver tissue becomes damaged and is replaced by scar tissue, making it difficult for the liver to perform its primary functions of removing toxins from the body; processing nutrients, hormones, and drugs; and producing proteins and other substances.

There are many possible causes for cirrhosis. The most common cause is alcoholism followed by chronic hepatitis. Other diseases such as Wilson's disease, cystic fibrosis, biliary cirrhosis, congestive heart failure, and parasitic infections can also cause liver damage that result in cirrhosis.

At first, many people show very few if any symptoms. However, as time passes, people with cirrhosis will begin to have symptoms such as fatigue, loss of appetite, nausea, weight loss, weakness, drowsiness, diarrhea, anemia, and will begin having slurred speech and bleed and bruise easily. As the liver functions worsen, fluid builds up in the abdomen (ascites) and legs (edema). During the later stages, some people may have severe itching caused by dry skin and jaundice, the yellowing of the whites of the eyes and skin.

Cirrhosis is usually diagnosed during a routine doctor's visit from the patient's symptoms, medical history, and a physical examination. In order to see if the liver is scarred, the doctor may do a CT scan or an ultrasound and in order to confirm the diagnosis, the doctor may do a liver biopsy.

At this time, there is no known cure for cirrhosis. The only thing that can be done is treat the symptoms and complications. The main goal is to reduce/stop the progress of the disease and try to reverse any damage that has already been done to the liver. If the cirrhosis is caused by alcoholism, stop drinking. If it is caused by hepatitis, the doctor will prescribe drugs to treat the hepatitis infection. If there is fluid buildup, the doctor will suggest a low sodium diet and diuretics. If there is an abundance of fluid buildup in the abdomen, the doctor will suggest having it removed through a needle during a procedure called paracentesis. Doctors suggest that lactulose be taken to remove ammonia and other toxins from the body. In the event of total liver failure, a liver transplant may be the only other option left. If people who have cirrhosis will have complications treated; refrain from drinking alcohol; eat a healthy, well-balanced diet; get enough rest; and remain free of infection, they can live for years. Those who have a mild case of cirrhosis, where there is enough normal, healthy tissue left, have even a better chance. Approximately 25,000 people die from cirrhosis every year, making it the seventh leading cause of death by disease in the United States.

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Books:

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Younossi, Zobair M. *Practical Management Of Liver Diseases.* New York, NY : Cambridge University Press, 2008.

Zein, Nizar, and Kevin M. Edwards. *The Cleveland Clinic Guide To Liver Diseases.* New York, NY : Kaplan Publishing , 2009.

For additional books, eBooks, and periodicals, please consult the MCCPL catalog and the EBSCO, Gale, and Oxford databases on the MCCPL and AVL websites.

Websites:

"Cirrhosis." National Institute of Diabetes and Digestion and Kidney Diseases (NIDDK). Dec. 2008. NIH Publication No. 09-1134. <http://www.niddk.nih.gov/health-information/health-topics/liver-disease/cirrhosis/pages/ez.aspx> (accessed November 20, 2014).

Organizations:

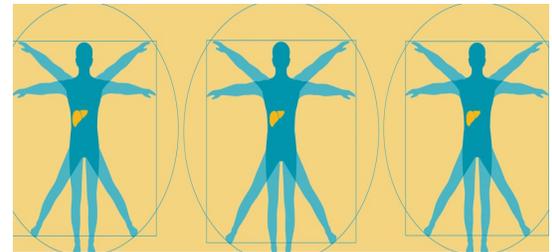
American Liver Foundation
75 Madison Lane, Suite 603
New York, NY, 10038
Phone: 1-800-456-4837
Fax: 212-483-8179
Email: webmail@liverfoundation.org
URL: <http://www.liverfoundation.org>

Alabama Chapter
4 Office Park Circle, Suite 304
Birmingham, AL, 35223
Phone: 205-879-0354
Fax: 205-879-0358
Email: aamliveral@aol.com

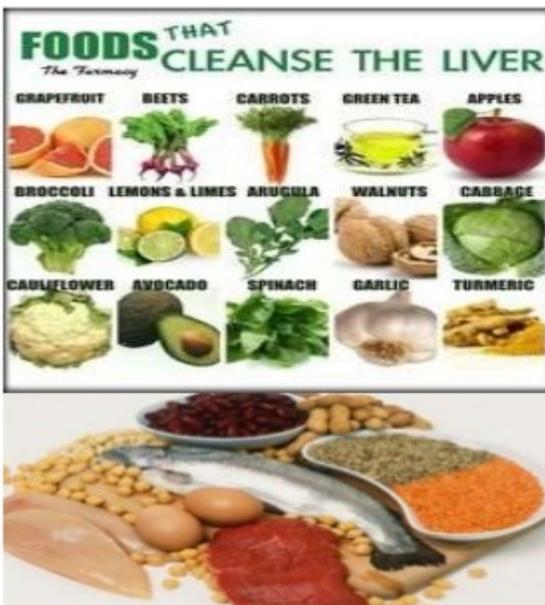
National Institute of Health (NIH)
9000 Rockville Pike
Bethesda, MD, 20892
Phone: 301-496-4000
URL: <http://www.nih.gov>

United Network For Organ Sharing
P.O. Box 2484
Richmond, VA, 23218
Phone: 804-782-4800
URL: <http://www.unos.org>

Article and Pathfinder written by Tommy Anderson, Collection Development Librarian, Juliette Hampton Morgan Memorial Library



Eat a healthy diet for Cirrhosis Liver Failure



- People with cirrhosis can experience malnutrition. Combat this with a healthy plant-based diet that includes a variety of fruits and vegetables. Choose lean protein, such as legumes, poultry or fish. Avoid raw seafood.