

TO YOUR HEALTH

Cirrhosis

What is Cirrhosis?

Cirrhosis is scarring of the liver, which happens when hard scar tissue replaces soft healthy tissue. Cirrhosis occurs in response to damage to the liver. As it tries to repair itself, scar tissue forms. As more scar tissue forms, it becomes difficult for the liver to function properly.



What Does The Liver Do?

The liver is the body's largest internal organ. The liver plays an important role in the body's metabolism. The liver has many functions, including taking up, storing, and processing nutrients from food and delivering them to the rest of the body. It also helps to remove waste products, make clotting proteins, immune factors and produce bile.

What Causes Cirrhosis?

Chronic hepatitis C and alcohol-related liver disease are the most common causes of cirrhosis in the United States. The incidence of cirrhosis, caused by fatty liver disease, is rising due to increasing rates of obesity. Drinking too much alcohol, hepatitis C and fatty liver disease all cause liver damage, which over time can lead to cirrhosis.

Other causes of cirrhosis include bile duct diseases, which limits the flow of bile from the liver into the small intestine. Some genetic diseases can also lead to cirrhosis. Many people with cirrhosis have more than one cause of liver damage.

Symptoms Of Cirrhosis

The buildup of scar tissue that causes cirrhosis is usually a slow and gradual process. Many people with cirrhosis have no symptoms in the early stages

of the disease. However, as the disease progresses, a person may experience the following symptoms:

- Fatigue, or feeling tired
- Weakness
- Loss of appetite
- Weight loss
- Nausea
- Spider-like blood vessels
- Severe itching
- Abdominal pain
- Jaundice
- Bruising or bleeding easily

How Is Cirrhosis Diagnosed?

Cirrhosis may initially be diagnosed based on the presence of certain medical conditions. Based on these initial findings, your doctor may order blood tests that check liver and kidney function. They may also test you for hepatitis B and C. A tissue sample (biopsy) may also be done to determine the extent of liver damage. If you have cirrhosis, your doctor is likely to recommend regular diagnostic tests to monitor for signs of disease progression or complications, especially dilated esophageal veins (varices) and liver cancer.

What Treatments Are Available?

Treatment options for cirrhosis depend on the cause and the level of liver damage. Depending on the disease causing cirrhosis, medications

or lifestyle changes may be used for treatment. The goals of treatment are to prevent further liver damage and reduce complications. If cirrhosis has reached end stage, a liver transplant may be necessary.

Preventing Further Damage

It is possible to prevent further liver damage with proper management of cirrhosis. A healthy diet is important in all stages of cirrhosis because malnutrition is common in people with this disease. Other steps you can take include:

- Stop drinking alcohol and avoid illegal substances.
- Limit salt in your diet to prevent or reduce fluid buildup.
- Talk to your doctor about all of the medications, vitamins and supplements you take.
- Get a hepatitis A and B vaccination and be screened for hepatitis C.

Additional patient information about digestive health topics are available online at www.PAGIconsultants.com.



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