



KNOW THE FACTS CIRRHOSIS

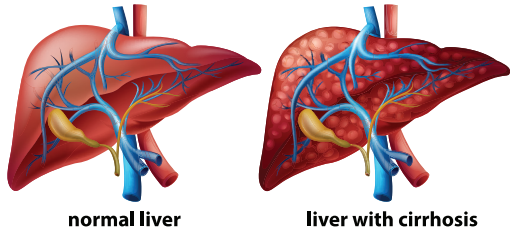


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Digital Version



normal liver

liver with cirrhosis

WHY IS THE LIVER IMPORTANT?

The liver is the largest internal organ in the body. It has many vital functions. It produces bile, a mixture of chemicals, which helps in digestion. It helps in breaking down food to turn it into energy. It also removes harmful substances from the blood and helps in fighting infection. It makes chemicals that are important for blood clotting. It stores iron, vitamins and other essential substances. The liver is necessary for survival and there is currently no way that a person can survive without the liver.

WHAT IS CIRRHOSIS?

The normal liver has a smooth surface and is soft in consistency. Cirrhosis is the scarring of the liver - hard scar tissue replaces soft healthy tissue. As cirrhosis becomes worse, the liver is not able to perform its functions.

WHAT CAUSES CIRRHOSIS?

Cirrhosis is caused by chronic (long-term) liver diseases that damage the liver. It usually takes many years for liver damage to lead to cirrhosis. Common causes of cirrhosis are alcohol, Hepatitis B, Hepatitis C, fatty liver disease and certain genetic diseases.

HOW DOES ALCOHOL DAMAGE THE LIVER?

Chronic alcohol use is the leading cause of cirrhosis. Excessive alcohol causes the liver to get inflamed, which overtime, can

lead to cirrhosis. Even small quantities of alcohol, if taken over a prolonged period of time, can lead to significant liver damage.

WHAT INFECTIONS CAUSE CIRRHOSIS?

Chronic Hepatitis B and C viruses are important causes of cirrhosis in India. One may get Hepatitis B and C viruses by blood transfusion, infected needles and razors, sexual transmission and transmission from mother to child during birth. These viruses cause persistent infection of the liver, that lead to cirrhosis, over time. About one in four people with chronic Hepatitis B or C develops cirrhosis. Early detection of these viruses and successful treatment can prevent the development of cirrhosis.

CAN FAT IN THE LIVER CAUSE CIRRHOSIS?

People who are overweight, have diabetes or high cholesterol can accumulate fat in the liver. This is known as fatty liver. In some people, fatty liver can progress to cirrhosis.

WHAT OTHER DISEASES CAN CAUSE CIRRHOSIS?

Certain rare diseases of the bile ducts can lead to cirrhosis. In these diseases, there is an obstruction of bile flow to the small intestine. The bile backs up in the liver causing the liver to swell and can lead to cirrhosis. These diseases are known as primary sclerosing cholangitis and primary biliary cirrhosis. Excess iron or copper deposition in the liver can also lead to cirrhosis. Certain genetic diseases can lead to cirrhosis, as well.

WHAT ARE SYMPTOMS OF CIRRHOSIS IN ITS EARLY STAGE?

There are usually no symptoms of cirrhosis in its early stage. Patients feel healthy and unless certain blood tests and other special investigations are done, it may

not be possible to detect cirrhosis at all. Almost 80 percent of the liver needs to be damaged before a patient develops symptoms.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF ADVANCED CIRRHOSIS?

Symptoms of advanced cirrhosis include loss of appetite, tiredness, nausea, weight loss, abdominal pain, and itching. Other severe complications include:

- Jaundice, a yellow discoloration of the skin and eyes
- Bruising and bleeding easily from nose, gums and skin
- Excess water builds up, leading to swelling of the legs (edema) and abdomen (ascites)
- Mental confusion
- Vomiting of blood

HOW IS CIRRHOSIS DIAGNOSED?

Cirrhosis is diagnosed by symptoms, medical history, blood tests and a physical examination. Scans of the liver are often required. An easy test to detect cirrhosis in a person without any symptoms is a Fibroscan. A Fibroscan is a special scan that detects the stiffness of the liver. As the liver stiffness increases, the severity of cirrhosis also increases. A liver biopsy may be needed to find out the exact cause of cirrhosis and to check how much of the liver is damaged.

HOW IS CIRRHOSIS TREATED?

It is important to find the exact reason for cirrhosis. Whatever is causing the liver damage has to be treated. Alcohol should be completely stopped. Hepatitis B and C can be effectively treated with medicines. Control of obesity, diabetes, blood pressure and cholesterol is important for patients with fatty liver-related cirrhosis. The goals of treatment are to prevent further liver

damage and reduce complications. Certain complications like accumulation of excess fluid in the body, secondary infections, and internal bleeding need specific medicines. When cirrhosis cannot be treated, and the patient develops signs of liver failure, the only possible treatment is a liver transplant.

WHAT IS THE BEST WAY TO MANAGE CIRRHOSIS?

- Maintain a healthy lifestyle (eat a healthy diet and exercise regularly).
- Stop drinking alcohol completely.
- Check for Hepatitis B and C and take treatment if you have one of these viruses.
- Limit salt in your diet. This reduces accumulation of water and swelling of the body.
- Do not take any medications, vitamins or supplements without consulting your doctor.
- Get vaccinations as per advice of your doctor.
- Weakness of bones is common in cirrhosis. Use calcium and vitamin D supplements.
- You may require regular blood tests to assess the condition of your liver periodically.
- You may need regular ultrasound scans to detect cancers that develop in cirrhotic livers. Liver cancers, if detected early, when they are small, can be treated effectively.
- Do not take herbal therapies or other alternative medicines for cirrhosis. Some of these medications can actually cause more harm to the liver.



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