

# Insights on Liver Cirrhosis

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## Commentary

Cirrhosis is a late stage of liver scarring (fibrosis) caused by a variety of liver diseases and conditions, including hepatitis and chronic alcoholism. When your liver is injured, whether from disease, excessive alcohol consumption, or another cause, it attempts to repair itself. Scar tissue forms as a result of the process. Cirrhosis causes scar tissue to form, making it difficult for the liver to function (decompensated cirrhosis). Cirrhosis is a potentially fatal disease. Cirrhosis's liver damage is generally irreversible. However, if liver cirrhosis is detected early and the underlying cause is treated, further damage can be limited and, in rare cases, reversed.

High blood pressure in the veins that supply the liver (portal hypertension). Cirrhosis slows the normal flow of blood through the liver, thus increasing pressure in the vein that brings blood to the liver from the intestines and spleen. Swelling in the legs and abdomen. The increased pressure in the portal vein can cause fluid to accumulate in the legs (edema) and in the abdomen (ascites). Edema and ascites also may result from the inability of the liver to make enough of certain blood proteins, such as albumin.

Enlargement of the spleen (splenomegaly). Portal hypertension can also cause changes to and swelling of the spleen, and trapping of white blood cells and platelets. Decreased white blood cells and platelets in your blood can be the first sign of cirrhosis. Bleeding. Portal hypertension can cause blood to be redirected to smaller veins. Strained by the extra pressure, these smaller veins can burst, causing serious bleeding. Portal hypertension may cause enlarged veins (varices) in the esophagus (esophageal varices) or the stomach (gastric varices) and lead to life-threatening bleeding. If the liver can't make enough clotting factors, this also can contribute to continued bleeding.

Infections. If you have cirrhosis, your body may have difficulty fighting infections. Ascites can lead to bacterial peritonitis, a serious infection. Malnutrition. Cirrhosis may make it more difficult for your body to process nutrients, leading to weakness and weight loss. Buildup of toxins in the brain

(hepatic encephalopathy). A liver damaged by cirrhosis isn't able to clear toxins from the blood as well as a healthy liver can. These toxins can then build up in the brain and cause mental confusion and difficulty concentrating. With time, hepatic encephalopathy can progress to unresponsiveness or coma.

Your symptoms may vary, depending on how severe your cirrhosis is. Mild cirrhosis may not cause any symptoms at all. Fluid buildup in the belly (ascites), Vomiting blood, often from bleeding in the blood vessels in the food pipe (esophagus), Gallstones, Itching, Yellowing of the skin and eyes (jaundice), Kidney failure Your previous health will be examined by your healthcare provider. He or she will perform a physical examination on you. You may also be subjected to tests such as blood tests. These will include liver function tests to determine whether or not the liver is functioning properly. You may also be subjected to tests to determine your blood's ability to clot. Biopsy of the liver. Small tissue samples from the liver are taken with a needle or during surgery. To determine the type of liver disease, the samples are examined under a microscope [1-5].

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