

Liver Cancer



LiverWELL[®]

Stages of liver disease

There are many different types of liver disease. No matter what type you have, the damage to your liver progresses in a similar way. The good news is that if liver disease is caught early, treatment can be very effective. But if left untreated, your liver will get worse.



Fatty Liver:

An accumulation of fat in the liver cells can occur over many years, without obvious symptoms or pain. Regular blood tests can identify fatty liver disease early and be reversed.



Inflammation:

An inflamed (swollen) liver can be caused by many factors, including fatty liver disease, alcohol, viral infection, problems with your immune system or toxins. Treatment can help the inflammation go away. If it is alcohol-related, the first step is to cease drinking alcohol completely.



Fibrosis:

If an inflamed liver is not treated, healthy soft tissue will begin to scar and harden. With treatment, fibrosis (scarring) can heal.



Cirrhosis:

A liver with cirrhosis is full of hard scarred tissue. Treatment can stop or reduce liver damage, protect your liver to ensure it keeps functioning and improve your liver health.



Liver Cancer:

Risk of liver cancer is higher if you have hepatitis B, hepatitis C, fatty liver disease and liver cirrhosis of any cause.



Liver Failure:

Liver failure is when the liver stops working properly. This is a very serious condition that needs urgent medical care. A liver transplant might be an option.

Talking about your concerns

If you are concerned you might have liver disease or liver cancer, talk to your doctor who can run tests to measure how your liver is working.

If you need treatment, your doctor will prescribe medication to help your liver and will monitor your progress.

Liver treatment for hepatitis B and C can be accessed at a low cost through Medicare.

Your doctor can also refer you to liver specialists and oncologists.

An up-to-date directory of liver clinics and liver specialists is listed on the Hepatitis Victoria website.

Finding support

Try talking to friends and family for practical and emotional support. You can also talk to health providers – including nurses, counsellors, therapists, pharmacists, dieticians and nutritionists.

Cancer Council Call 13 11 20




Trustworthy information that is relevant with cancer nurses available to answer your questions and link you to services in your area. Cancer Council Victoria offers support groups for patients, family and carers.

Hepatitis Infoline - Call 1800 703 003

Free and anonymous. Trained professionals listen to your concerns and provide further information.

Practical tips for staying healthy

The free LiverWELL[™] app developed by Hepatitis Victoria has lots of tips on how to keep your liver healthy:

-  eating well: cut back on foods that are high in fat and sugar
-  getting active: try some exercise everyday
-  feeling well: take care of yourself emotionally, spiritually and physically
-  drink aware: do not drink alcohol.

For information and practical tips on managing your liver health, visit: www.liverwell.org.au or download the LiverWELL[™] app

LiverWELL[®]



Information

Useful Websites

www.cancer.org.au
www.liverwell.org.au
www.loveyourliver.com.au
www.quit.org.au
www.hepvic.org.au
www.cancervic.org.au
www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au

HEPATITIS VICTORIA

www.hepvic.org.au info@hepvic.org.au
Hepatitis Infoline: 1800 703 003

Produced by Hepatitis Victoria. This information is general in nature and not intended as medical advice. Consult your doctor for further information.

Why is your liver so important?

Your liver has around 500 different tasks to perform to help keep your body working at its best.

Its two most important roles are cleaning your blood and aiding digestion by breaking down fat and sugar for your body to use as energy. A healthy liver helps fight infection and remove harmful toxins from your body. A damaged liver cannot carry out these jobs properly.

Liver facts:

- your largest internal organ
- on the right-hand side of your torso, behind your ribs
- is the key to breaking down and absorbing fats in the body
- 1.5 litres of blood flows through your liver every minute

Hepatocellular carcinoma

Primary liver cancer is a malignant tumour that starts in the liver. The main type of primary liver cancer that can affect adults is hepatocellular carcinoma (HCC).

HCC starts in the hepatocytes, the liver's main cell type, and is also known as hepatoma.

There are other less common types of liver cancer, including bile duct cancer and a very rare type of cancer called angiosarcoma.

We recommend referral by your GP to a liver clinic or specialist to seek the necessary care where a team approach is taken to manage liver cancer.

Looking out for symptoms of liver cancer*

- Discomfort in the upper right abdomen
- A swollen abdomen
- Jaundice (yellowing of the skin and whitening of the eyes)
- Easy bruising or bleeding
- Loss of appetite or feelings of fullness after small meals
- Unintentional weight loss
- Pale, chalky bowel movements and dark urine.

** Please note these are generalised symptoms and not specific to just liver cancer.*

If you have liver disease or develop any of these symptoms, please discuss with your GP or health specialist.

Treatment

Treatment of hepatocellular carcinoma (HCC) – the main type of liver cancer – varies greatly depending on how big and how many liver tumors you have, whether it has spread outside of the liver, and how healthy your liver is.

Treatment can consist of curative treatment like surgery and some radiology procedures, other radiological treatments, or tablet chemotherapy. Sometimes people with liver disease may have a liver transplant.

The ideal treatment is tailored to you by a team of specialists including a gastroenterologist and hepatologists (liver specialists), surgeons, radiologists, oncologists (cancer specialists) and nurses.

What is liver cancer?

Liver Cancer

Cancer is a disease of the cells which are the body's basic building blocks – they make up tissues and organs. The body constantly makes new cells to help us grow, replace worn-out tissue and heal injuries.

Liver cancer can develop when liver cells become abnormal and keep multiplying and growing. In solid cancers, such as liver cancer, the abnormal cells form a mass or lump called a tumour.

Cancerous tumours, also known as malignant tumours, have the potential to spread destroying normal cells and tissue.

The cancer cells can spread by traveling through the bloodstream to other parts of the body.

Liver cancer can affect anyone

In Australia about 1900 people are diagnosed with primary liver cancer every year and almost three times as many men are affected compared to women.

The leading cause of liver cancer in Australia is hepatitis C followed by alcohol consumption and hepatitis B.

Non-alcoholic fatty liver disease (NAFLD) related liver cancer is also increasing as an indirect cause.

While cancer death rates are decreasing for most cancer types, liver cancer is one notable exception. Despite recent advances in cures for hepatitis C and vaccination programs for hepatitis B, treatment uptake remains low and death rates are increasing.

We encourage people to see their GP, and to get a blood test to treat your liver disease.

Getting assessed

Diagnosis

Liver cancer is diagnosed using a number of tests. These include blood tests and imaging scans such as ultrasound, CT (computerized tomography) and MRI (magnetic resonance imaging).

In some cases, a tissue sample (biopsy) may also be tested to confirm diagnosis and staging - how far the cancer has spread.

Liver cancer and viral hepatitis

An estimated 71% of cases of liver cancer globally are caused from either hepatitis B and or hepatitis C.

Australia has had some success with the uptake of direct acting antiviral medicines (DAA's) which cure hepatitis C and immunisation for hepatitis B.

Recent data shows that the rate of uptake of the DAA's is declining and if this trend continues it will jeopardise the elimination of viral hepatitis as a public health threat and lead to more cases of liver cancer.

Get a blood test to find out if you have hepatitis B or hepatitis C because both viruses can be managed.

Treatment for Hepatitis B and C can be accessed at a low cost through Medicare.