

Alcoholic liver disease

Patient education

What is alcoholic liver disease?

Alcoholic liver disease is liver damage that is caused due to excessive alcohol consumption over a long period of time. This may lead to the development of fatty liver, alcoholic hepatitis or cirrhosis.

What is fatty liver disease?

Your liver digests fat from the food you eat. When you consume more fat and sugar than your body requires, your liver stores the excess fat.

What is alcoholic hepatitis?

Alcoholic hepatitis is a type of liver inflammation caused by consuming a large amount of alcohol over a long period of time. The liver's capacity to function normally is reduced due to inflammation.

What is cirrhosis?

Cirrhosis causes scar tissue to replace healthy liver cells. This restricts blood from flowing through the liver, making it difficult for your liver to function.

How does alcohol affect my liver?

Your liver helps remove toxins such as alcohol from your blood.

- Only a specific amount of alcohol can be eliminated by your liver in a certain amount of time
- If you consume more alcohol than your liver can handle, the excess alcohol will eventually damage your liver cells
- Severe scarring of the liver can result in liver cancer or death

What increases the risks?

- Family history of alcoholic liver disease
- Alcohol abuse
- Overweight or obese
- Type 2 diabetes
- A pre-existing liver condition

How is this treated?

- Stop drinking alcohol
- Take medicine to decrease withdrawal symptoms
- Join a support group
- Unless your doctor says it is safe, do not take alcohol-containing medications or consume alcohol-containing foods
- Follow instructions from your doctor about a healthy diet and lifestyle
- Maintain all follow-up appointments as advised by your doctor

If you have been diagnosed with alcoholic liver disease, please contact your doctor or health care provider immediately if you are experiencing any of the following:

- Headaches
- Fever
- Your skin begins to look dark, pale or yellow
- Decreased appetite
- Develop new pain in your abdomen

If you have been diagnosed with alcoholic liver disease, please get help immediately if you are experiencing any of the following:

- Throwing up blood
- Develop jaundice
- Have severely itchy skin
- Your legs swell
- Your abdomen suddenly swells
- Have blood in your stool
- Your stool looks black
- Having trouble with the following:
 - Thinking
 - Walking
 - Balancing
 - Breathing

Where can I get more information?

Canadian Liver Foundation: liver.ca/patients-caregivers/liver-diseases

Reference: Alcoholic Liver Disease. (2021, May 27). Elsevier Inc: ClinicalKey for Nursing.
Retrieved from https://www.clinicalkey.com/nursing/#1/content/patient_handout/5-s2.0-pe_f45a4b7c-7f01-458a-b920-7d9c4f47d660