



Patient & Family Guide  
2017

# Alcohol Induced Liver Disease

Aussi disponible en français :  
*Maladie du foie due à l'alcool* (FF85-1789)



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# Alcohol Induced Liver Disease

Your liver breaks down alcohol as part of getting rid of it from your body. Drinking more alcohol than your liver can deal with leads to problems with breaking down proteins, fat, and carbohydrates into forms that your body can use.

**There are three kinds of diseases that are caused by drinking too much alcohol:**

- Fat induced liver disease
- Alcohol induced hepatitis (inflammation)
- Alcohol induced cirrhosis (scarring)

Heavy drinkers (drinking more than 2 drinks per day **OR** more than 24 drinks per week) may go from fatty liver disease to alcoholic hepatitis to alcoholic cirrhosis, though the path may vary from person to person. The chance of getting cirrhosis goes up when a person has another chronic liver infection (e.g. hepatitis C). The concentration of alcohol is the same if a person drinks one beer, one 6-ounce glass of wine, or one ounce of spirits (e.g. rum, whiskey, bourbon, gin).

### **Fat induced liver disease:**

- Is caused by a buildup of fat cells in the liver.
- Often has no symptoms, or you may notice a tender or sore belly.
- Is seen in almost all heavy drinkers.
- Can be reduced by drinking less alcohol, or even better, by stopping drinking alcohol.

### **Alcohol induced hepatitis:**

- Is caused by swelling of the liver.
- Has symptoms such as loss of appetite, upset stomach or vomiting, sore belly, fever and/or jaundice (yellow skin/eyes).
- In its mild form can slowly get worse over many years.
- In its severe form can lead to other major health problems, most often after a drinking binge.
- Happens in about 1 in 3 heavy drinkers.
- Can be limited or stopped from getting worse by not drinking, or by significantly lowering how much alcohol you drink.

## **Alcohol induced cirrhosis:**

- Is the most serious of the alcoholic liver diseases.
- Is caused by scar tissue taking the place of normal, healthy liver tissue.
- Happens in 10-20% of heavy drinkers, usually after about 10 years of drinking.
- Can't be undone, although stopping alcohol can limit or stop it from getting worse.

## **What kinds of health problems happen from alcoholic liver diseases?**

Other health problems may happen after many years of drinking. They are often serious and life-threatening. They may include:

- › Buildup of fluids in the stomach area
- › Bleeding from veins in the esophagus (food tube)
- › Enlarged spleen
- › High blood pressure
- › Changes in how well you can focus and think
- › Kidney failure
- › Liver cancer

## How are these conditions identified?

They are often suspected due to health or lifestyle issues. Your doctor may do blood tests and imaging (a special kind of X-ray), but a liver biopsy (removal and testing of liver tissue) is needed for an exact diagnosis.

## How are these conditions treated?

The best thing you can do is stop drinking. Some people may need to join an alcohol recovery program. Medicines can sometimes be used to manage related health problems. People with very severe and irreversible (permanent) liver damage may need a liver transplant. Before this, the person must not be drinking any alcohol.

Anyone suffering from an alcohol induced liver disease can improve their quality and length of life by **not drinking. This is essential.** For those who do not stop drinking, the chance of getting better is poor and they are likely to face many other related problems.

For most people, moderate drinking does not lead to liver disease. For people who already have an alcohol induced liver disease, **any amount of drinking will make the disease worse.**

**The most important things you can do are:**

1. Do not drink alcohol.
2. Follow a healthy lifestyle that includes healthy eating and regular exercise.



Please use the space below to write down any questions you have. Ask your healthcare provider your questions.

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