

What Is Liver Disease?

Liver disease refers to chronic conditions that damage your liver over time. One of the liver's most important functions is filtering toxins from your blood. Your liver's role as a filter makes it vulnerable to the toxins it processes. Too many toxins can overwhelm its ability to function. This can happen temporarily or over a long period of time.

What Are the Stages of Chronic Liver Disease?

Stage 1: Hepatitis

Hepatitis is inflammation in your liver tissues. Inflammation is your liver's response to injury or toxicity. It's an attempt to purge infections and start the healing process. Acute hepatitis (an immediate and temporary response) often accomplishes this. But when the injury or toxicity continues, so does the inflammation. Chronic hepatitis causes hyperactive healing that eventually results in scarring (fibrosis).

Stage 3: Cirrhosis

Cirrhosis is severe, permanent scarring in your liver. This is the stage where fibrosis is no longer reversible. When your liver no longer has enough healthy cells left to work with, its tissues can no longer regenerate. But you can still slow or stop the damage at this stage. Cirrhosis will begin to affect your liver function, but your body will attempt to compensate for the loss, so you might not notice at first.

Stage 2: Fibrosis

Fibrosis is the stiffening of your liver as thin bands of scar tissue gradually add up. Scar tissue reduces blood flow through your liver, which reduces its access to oxygen and nutrients. This is how your liver's vitality begins to gradually decline. Remarkably, some amount of fibrosis is reversible. Your liver cells can regenerate, and scarring can diminish if the damage slows down enough for it to recover.

Stage 4: Liver Failure

Liver failure begins when your liver can no longer function adequately for your body's needs. As liver functions begin to break down, you'll begin to feel the effects throughout your body. Chronic liver failure is a gradual process, but it is eventually fatal without a liver transplant.

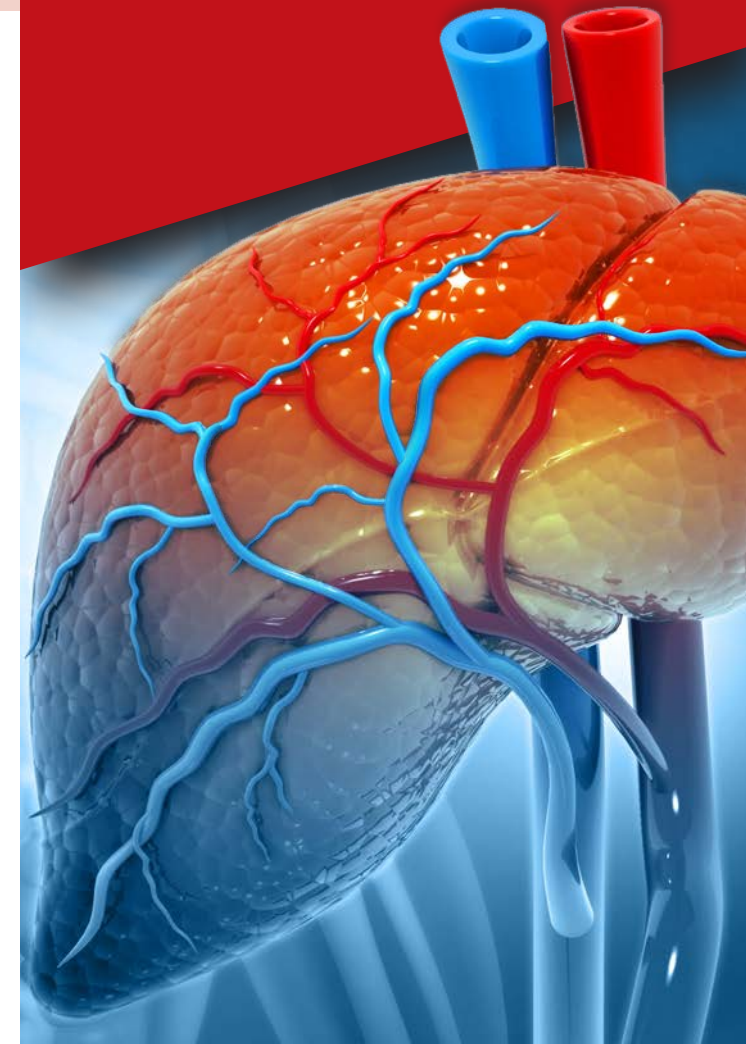
**OVER 50,000 PEOPLE DIE
FROM LIVER DISEASE IN
THE U.S. EACH YEAR.**

RESOURCES

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
www.cdc.gov

American Liver Foundation
liverfoundation.org

**LIVER DISEASE:
MAINTAIN YOUR
BODY'S GUARDIAN**



**HEALTHY
DIRECTIONS**

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What Are The Symptoms?

Chronic liver disease often will not cause symptoms in the early stages. But sometimes it begins with an episode of acute hepatitis. You might have a fever, stomachache, or nausea for a brief period while your immune system works to defeat the infection. If it doesn't defeat it, it becomes a chronic infection.

Some other causes might also begin with more acute symptoms or have occasional episodes of acute symptoms.

Early symptoms:

- Upper abdominal pain
- Nausea or loss of appetite
- Fatigue

Symptoms of later-stage liver disease:

- Jaundice – yellow tint to the whites of your eyes and skin
- Dark-colored urine
- Light-colored stool
- Digestive difficulties, especially with fats
- Weight loss and muscle loss
- Mild brain impairment
- Itchy skin, but with no visible rash

What Causes Liver Disease?

There are over 100 types of liver disease that fall into a handful of subtypes. Causes include, but are not limited to:

- **Viral infections** – Viral hepatitis infections that become chronic can cause chronic hepatitis, including hepatitis B and hepatitis C.
- **Alcohol-induced hepatitis** – If left untreated, it can cause cirrhosis and liver failure.
- **Toxic hepatitis** – Chronic overexposure to toxins, such as industrial chemicals or drugs.
- **Non-alcohol related fatty liver disease** – Metabolic conditions associated with obesity, high blood sugar, and high blood lipids can cause excess fat storage in your liver.
- **Autoimmune diseases** – Autoimmune conditions can cause chronic inflammation and scarring in your liver or bile ducts.
- **Cardiovascular diseases** – Conditions that affect blood flow to and from your liver can cause chronic damage.



Prevention and Treatment

You can help prevent liver disease by:

- Getting vaccinated – Vaccines are available to prevent viral hepatitis A and B.
- Practicing good hygiene – Handwashing after using the bathroom, safe food handling, and safe needle use can help prevent infections.
- Drinking alcohol in moderation and using medications as directed.
- Managing metabolic factors such as your blood lipids and blood sugar. A healthcare provider can help with this.

Some types of liver diseases have specific medical treatments. For example, antivirals treat viral hepatitis, while corticosteroids and immunosuppressants treat autoimmune diseases. In many cases, lifestyle changes are the primary treatment for liver disease. Reducing the toxic load on your liver is important with any type of liver disease, but essential for those caused by excess fat storage, alcohol, or other toxins.

By The Numbers

- Approximately 1.8% of U.S. adults (4.5 million) have liver disease.
- Liver disease causes over 50,000 U.S. deaths a year. Deaths are mostly from complications of cirrhosis, with acute liver failure accounting for a small portion.
- Liver disease affects people assigned male at birth twice as often as people assigned female at birth.



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