

A Guide to Understanding Advanced Liver Disease



Liver Foundation acknowledges the
Traditional Custodians of this land.

We pay our respects to Elders past,
present and emerging.

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How to use this booklet

Learning about liver problems can be scary.

Many people feel this way.

You are not alone. There are people that can help you.

You can talk to:

- Your GP
- Your specialist
- A nurse from the Liver Foundation Support Line.

It is free and private.

You can:

- Ask questions
- Ask a friend or family member to come with you
- Ask for an interpreter

These are your rights

IMPORTANT WORDS TO KNOW

They will help you read this booklet.

Liver	The liver is the biggest organ inside your body. • It weighs around 1.5kg • It sits on the right hand side of your belly under your ribs • It helps you process everything that you eat and drink. • It also gets rid of things that are bad for you like toxins.
Cirrhosis	This means that the liver: • Has got hard and stiff from scarring • Is very sick • Cannot work properly
Advanced Liver Disease	• This is when your liver is not working properly • You may start to get complications from cirrhosis like the ones listed below

IMPORTANT WORDS TO KNOW

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Ascites

This means:

- Fluid builds up in the belly
- The belly can look swollen
- The belly may feel tight or sore

Jaundice

Jaundice means yellow skin or yellow eyes

Varices

Varices means:

- Swollen veins in the food pipe or stomach
- These veins can bleed

Hepatic encephalopathy

Brain problems caused by a sick liver.

This means you may feel:

- Confused
- Very sleepy

This can happen when toxins in your blood harm your brain

Toxins

Toxins are bad chemicals in the blood that come from breaking down food and drink, or from having alcohol or drugs.

WHEN TO GET MEDICAL HELP FAST?



Call **000** now

or go to the **Emergency Department** now if you:

- Vomit blood
- Do black, sticky poo
- See blood in your poo
- Have a high fever
- Have strong pain in your belly
- Feel confused
- Feel very sleepy or are hard to wake

You are not alone.
We are here to help.



What is advanced liver disease?

This is when your liver stops working properly.

Doctors may call it advanced liver disease.

Or they may call it:

- End stage liver disease
- Decompensated cirrhosis

These words mean the same thing.

They mean the liver has a lot of damage.

The damage causes scarring that stops the liver from working well.

If your liver is very sick:

- Try to stay as healthy as you can
- Listen to your doctor's advice

This can help you stay well for a long time.

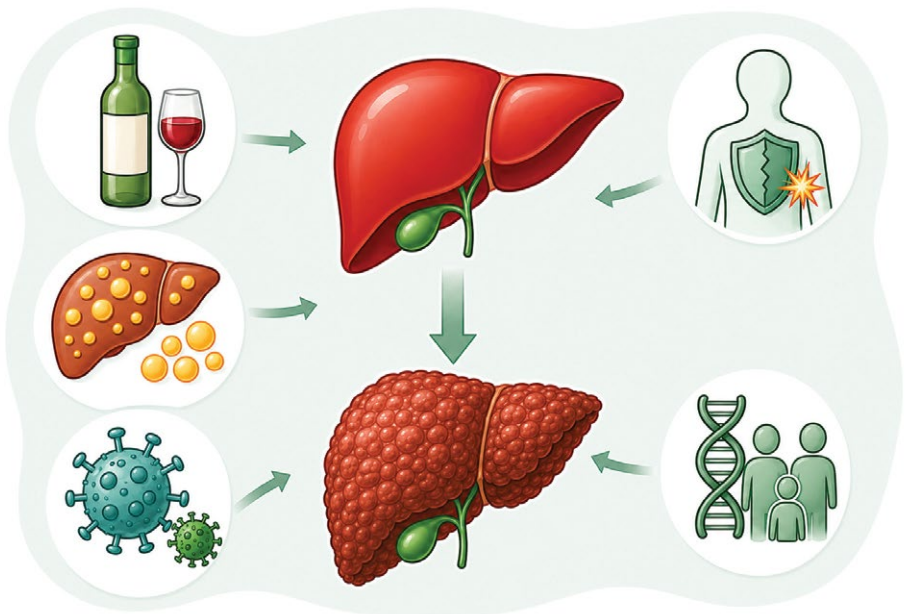
Why do liver problems happen?

Cirrhosis is when the liver is very sick and hard.

If someone has cirrhosis, the liver can get worse over time.

Some reasons for this are:

- Fatty liver
- Drinking too much alcohol
- Hepatitis B or hepatitis C
- Health problems where the body attacks itself
- A health problem passed down in your family, like haemochromatosis or Wilson's disease



How do I know I have advanced liver disease?

If you have cirrhosis, your liver can get very sick. This is called advanced liver disease.

You can get liver problems if you:

- Drink too much alcohol
- Have hepatitis B or C
- Are overweight
- Have high cholesterol
- Have type 2 diabetes
- Have high blood pressure
- Have a health problem where your body attacks itself
- Have people in your family with liver problems

What are the signs I have advanced liver disease?

See your doctor if you are worried.

If you feel your doctor does not listen to you:

- **Talk to your doctor again**
- **Bring someone with you**
- **Ask to see another doctor**

You need medical help fast if you:

- **Have swollen belly or strong pain in your belly**
- **Have a high fever**
- **Have very pale poo**
- **Have very dark wee**
- **Have yellow skin or yellow eyes**
- **Have black poo or blood in your poo**
- **Are feeling confused or very sleepy**
- **Are vomiting blood, this could be bleeding varices**

Varices

Blood vessels are small tubes that carry blood in your body.

When the liver is very sick, blood cannot flow through the liver well.

The blood then flows through other blood vessels.

These blood vessels can break and bleed.

This bleeding can happen in the food pipe or the stomach

This is a medical emergency and you need to

CALL 000 straight away

WHEN TO GET MEDICAL HELP FAST?



Call **000** now

or go to the **Emergency Department now** if you:

- Vomit blood
- Do black, sticky poo
- See blood in your poo
- Have high fever – with shaking or vomiting

Or if you:

- Feel confused or very sleepy
- Have new, strong belly pain

What to do next

If you think you have liver problems, see your doctor.

Your doctor can:

- Talk to you about your health
- Ask about your problems
- Do blood tests
- Do scans

This helps the doctor learn more about your liver.

If you have advanced liver disease, you can do things to help stop it from getting worse. This is what you can do:

- 1 Get help and treatment if you have hepatitis B or hepatitis C.
- 2 Stop all alcohol. Do not use alcohol in cooking.
- 3 Eat healthy food with lots of protein.
Ask your doctor what is good for you.
- 4 Get help with infections early.
Keep your vaccines up to date, like flu and COVID shots.
- 5 Keep diabetes and other health problems under control.

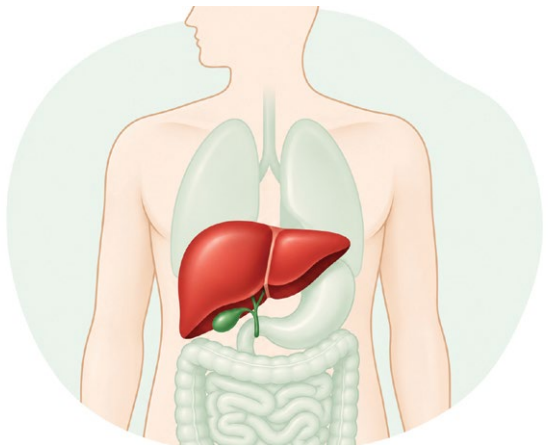
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- 6 Take your medications exactly as the doctor asks you.
 - 7 Check with your doctor before you take other medications, supplements or herbs.
 - 8 Go to all check ups, blood tests and scans.
 - 9 Keep active and stay strong. Listen to your health team.



Healthy living for my liver

You are not alone. We are here to help.

- Getting a new diagnosis can feel scary.
It can be hard to understand.
It is okay to go slowly.
- You do not need to do everything at once.
Start with one small step.
- It is very important to take care of your liver.
The liver helps your body every day.
- It helps with everything you eat and drink.
- It stores energy for your body.
It cleans the blood.



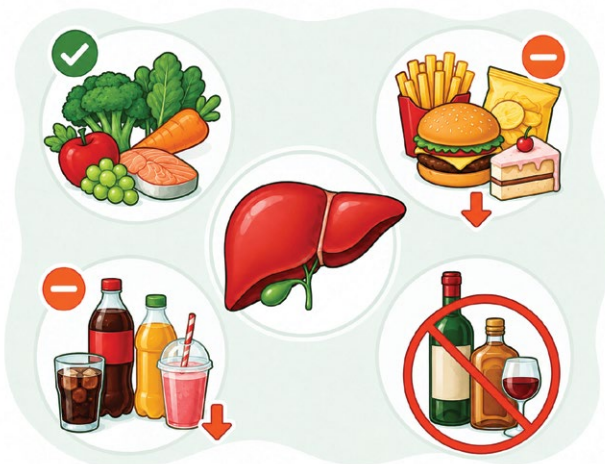
Healthy living for my liver

- Taking care of your liver can help your mood.
- It can help you stay strong.
- Having too much sugar, fat or alcohol can make fat build up in the liver.

A fatty liver cannot work well.

Over time, this could make the liver more sick.

- To keep your liver healthy, you can:
 - Eat more healthy, fresh food
 - Eat less junk food
 - Drink less sugary drinks and alcohol
 - If you have advanced liver disease you should not drink any alcohol



How do I take care of my liver?

Easy steps:

- Drink water during the day
- Eat more vegetables and fruit
- Go for a short walk
- Move your body for a few minutes
- Go to your appointments
- Call the Support Line and ask one question



Eating

Pick foods that you like and are low cost.

- Try not to skip any meals
- Eat protein at every meal
- Eat less takeaways, chips and cakes
- Drink less juice and soft drink

If you feel sick, not hungry or stressed:

- Eat small snacks every 2 to 3 hours
- Choose soft foods, like soup, yoghurt or smoothies
- Ask your doctor or dietitian for help



Staying active

Staying active is good for your whole body.

It is also good for your liver.

- Being active can help you:
- Stay healthy
- Reduce the chance of diabetes and heart problems
- Improve your mental health
- Keep you strong

Being active is good for you.

Start slowly.

Be active every day.

Staying active means things that:

- Make you a little short of breath
- Help keep your muscles strong, like squats

See your doctor before you start new exercise



Stop drinking alcohol

If you have cirrhosis or advanced liver disease, do not drink alcohol.

If stopping alcohol feels hard, you are not alone.

Talk to your doctor.

You can also call the Support Line for help.



Medications

It is important to take the medications your doctor gives you.

Talk to your doctor if you are worried.

Always check with your doctor before taking:

- Supplements
- Herbal medicine
- Over the counter medications

This is important because some things can make liver problems worse.

MORE INFORMATION



Scan the QR code to learn more about Advanced liver disease.

My notes

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Contact us

If you have questions about liver cancer or liver problems, you can call our Support Line.

You will speak to a liver nurse.

The nurse is caring and knows a lot about the liver.

The Support Line is:

- **Free and private.**

You do not have to give your name.

It's for people in Australia:

- Patients
 - Families
 - Carers
 - Health workers
-
- Open on weekdays 8am to 6pm
 - Closed on weekends and public holidays



Contact us

- You can talk to a nurse who knows a lot about liver problems

- Phone: 1800 841 118



- Email support@liver.org.au

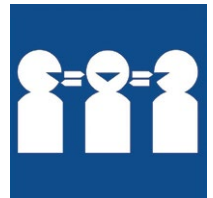


- You can ask for an Interpreter or Auslan.

- Call TIS National 131 450.

Tell them you want to speak to the

Liver Foundation Support Line at 1800 841 118.



MORE INFORMATION



Scan the QR code to learn more about Nurse-Led Support.

What is Liver Foundation?

Liver Foundation is an Australian organisation and we:

- Teach people about liver health
- Promote early testing and awareness of risk factors
- Support research
- Help people get care

The Liver Cancer Nurse Led Support Line:

- Is run by liver nurses
- Is funded by the Australian Government

The Support Line helps people with cancer and advanced liver disease

It helps people understand the health system.



[liver.org.au/languages/
easy-english](https://liver.org.au/languages/easy-english)