

LIVER DISEASE FOR TEENS & YOUNG ADULTS

What is the impact of liver disease?

Millions of Americans are affected by liver disease, including diseases such as:

- Steatotic liver disease*
- Viral hepatitis
- Alcohol-associated liver disease
- Genetic liver disease

What are the risks for liver disease?

Liver disease can be caused by any number of risk factors including heredity, viruses and unhealthy lifestyle such as consuming excessive amounts of alcohol or binge drinking, sharing needles and other equipment for injection drug use, getting unsanitary tattoos and piercings, having unprotected sex, poor diet, lack of exercise and being overweight.

What does your liver do?

Your liver acts like a filter processing everything we eat, drink, breathe, and absorb through our skin. It helps build muscle, makes bile to digest food, stops cuts from bleeding, kills germs and detoxifies substances that are harmful to your body

Alcohol and your liver

Alcohol is the most used drug among adults in the United States. The liver breaks down alcohol so it can be removed from your body. Drinking more alcohol than the body can process at any given time can cause serious liver injury, causing preventable diseases, even among young people. Some injuries that can occur are alcohol-associated hepatitis, metabolic dysfunction and alcohol-associated liver disease (MetALD)* and alcohol-associated cirrhosis.

What is binge drinking?

According to the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism: Binge drinking is a pattern of drinking that brings a person's blood alcohol concentration (BAC) to 0.08 grams percent or above. This typically happens when men consume five or more drinks and when women consume four or more drinks in two hours.

What is alcohol misuse?

Alcohol misuse is a pattern of drinking that interferes with day-to-day activities. Physical and psychological issues of alcohol misuse can include:

- Irritability and mood swings
- Memory problems
- Reduced inhibitions
- Depression and/or anxiety
- Lack of focus
- Legal problems

What is alcohol use disorder (AUD)?

Severe alcohol misuse is medically diagnosed as alcohol use disorder (AUD). AUD is a chronic relapsing brain disease characterized by compulsive alcohol use, loss of control over alcohol intake and a negative emotional state when not using. It is estimated that 401,000 adolescents (173,000 males/227,000 females) age 12-17, have AUD. Approximately 88,000 people die each year from alcohol-associated causes making alcohol the third leading cause of death in the U.S.

Hepatitis C & body art

The hepatitis C virus (HCV) can be transmitted through unsanitary tattoo and piercing practices. Reusable equipment must be cleaned using special sterilization process to prevent infection. Always go to a trained professional – avoid "do-it-yourself" or at-home tattooing or piercing. Make sure your tattoo and piercing shop follows state and local laws; you can check with your local department of health to learn more.

Other HCV risks

Sharing razors and other hygiene equipment can put you at risk for HCV. If someone with HCV cuts themselves and draws even a small amount of blood, you can be infected if it enters your bloodstream. Avoid practices such as “blood brothers” or “blood pacts” and, if you are ever with someone who is injured and bleeding, avoid medical risks by calling for emergency help.

Viral hepatitis & sex

Hepatitis A, B, and C can be transmitted sexually. Hepatitis A is transmitted through oral/anal contact, hepatitis B is transmitted through semen and vaginal secretions and hepatitis C can be transmitted if there is any blood transfer during sexual activities. Vaccines are available for hepatitis A and B, and highly recommended, however there is no vaccine for hepatitis C, so precautions are critical.

Drug induced liver injury

The liver processes and breaks down everything you put into your body so it is essential to always share with your doctor every type of medication you take.

Prescription medications

Prescription medications require a doctor’s prescription and must be dispensed by a licensed pharmacist.

Over-the-Counter (OTC) Medication

OTC medications do not require a doctor’s prescription and are safe when used as instructed on the label.

Supplements

Many dietary supplements (weight loss products, protein powders, body building products, and vitamins) are associated with liver damage. They are intended to enhance a person’s diet and often contain vitamins, minerals, amino acids, herbs or botanicals, and other substances. They have fewer rules and are not closely monitored.

Acetaminophen & the liver

Acetaminophen is a chemical compound used for pain relief and reducing fever. It can be found in the form of pills, syrups and drops in more than 600 prescription and OTC medications. When taken properly, acetaminophen is safe for most people however in high doses, it can be toxic to the liver. Acetaminophen overdose is the most common cause of drug-induced liver injury. Always read the dosing instructions on the label and if you are taking more than one medication, be sure to check their ingredients so you don’t double up on acetaminophen.

To learn more about ALF, scan the QR code below. For a complete list of our free resources, please visit: liverfoundation.org/resource-center.

**The nomenclature for fatty liver disease has recently been changed to steatotic liver disease, and alcohol-associated fatty liver disease is now known as metabolic dysfunction and alcohol-associated steatotic liver disease (MetALD).*

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For questions about liver wellness and disease, or for emotional support to patients at the point of crisis and information on local resources including physician referrals, please contact our Helpline at 1-800-465-4837.

