

# AUTOIMMUNE HEPATITIS (AIH)

## What is an autoimmune disease?

An autoimmune disease is one in which a person's immune system attacks its own healthy cells because it does not recognize the difference between its own cells and those that are foreign to the body.

## What is autoimmune hepatitis (AIH)?

Autoimmune hepatitis (AIH) is a liver disease in which the body's immune system attacks its own liver. AIH can cause inflammation (hepatitis). It can become a long-term (chronic) disease that leads to cirrhosis (scar buildup in the liver) and liver failure. If treated, however, most people will not progress to advanced disease and can live long lives.

AIH affects a greater number of women than men (90% women, 10% men). AIH is considered a rare disease, meaning it affects fewer than 200,000 people in the USA.

## Causes of AIH

Studies indicate that genetics play a role, as well as environmental factors such as stress and exposure to chemicals. Some medications and viruses may also have a connection to AIH.

## Diagnosis of AIH

AIH is diagnosed through liver enzyme (ALT and AST) blood tests. If these levels are higher than normal, doctors will try to confirm or rule out causes. If no specific cause can be found, additional testing can include ANA and SMA antibodies. Rare diseases such as AIH can often take longer to diagnose because doctors need to rule out more common causes of abnormal lab work.

## Treatment of AIH

Fortunately, medications are available that can greatly help people with AIH. Immunosuppressants are medications that reduce the reaction of the immune system. People with AIH have an overly active immune response, so the immunosuppressants calm that reaction to prevent damage to the liver. A liver specialist (gastroenterologist or hepatologist) can discuss these medications with you so you understand what they do and how they work.

**To learn more about AIH, scan the QR code below. For a complete list of all of our free resources, please visit: [liverfoundation.org/resource-center](https://liverfoundation.org/resource-center).**

ALF is solely responsible for this content.

Copyright 2023 | All rights reserved

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.

