



Your Liver. Your Life.

Liver Cysts

Why is the liver important?

The liver is the second largest organ in your body and is located under your rib cage on the right side. It weighs about three pounds and is shaped like a football that is flat on one side.

The liver performs many jobs in your body. It processes what you eat and drink into energy and nutrients your body can use. The liver also removes harmful substances from your blood.

What are liver cysts?

Liver cysts are abnormal sacs filled with fluid in the liver.

What causes liver cysts?

The cause of most liver cysts is unknown. Liver cysts can be present at birth or can develop at a later time. They usually grow slowly and are not detected until adulthood.

Some cysts are caused by a parasite, echinococcus that is found in sheep in different parts of the world.

What are the symptoms of liver cysts?

Most liver cysts do not cause any symptoms. However, if cysts become large, they can cause bloating and pain in the upper right part of your abdomen. Sometimes, liver cysts become large enough that you can feel them through your abdomen.

What are the complications of liver cysts?

Liver cysts can have rare complications of liver failure and liver cancer.

How are liver cysts diagnosed?

Since most liver cysts do not cause any symptoms, they usually are detected only on ultrasounds or computerized tomography (CT) scans. If symptoms do occur, a doctor may perform an abdominal CT scan to look at the liver.

A blood test will rule out a parasite as the cause of the liver cyst.

How are liver cysts treated?

Most liver cysts do not need to be treated. However, if cysts get large and painful, they may need to be drained or surgically removed. Cysts also may be surgically removed if they are stopping bile from reaching your intestine.

If a parasite is found, antibiotics are used for treatment.

What is polycystic liver disease?

Polycystic liver disease (PLD) is the development of multiple cysts in the liver. PLD cysts may cause pain, but they usually do not affect liver function. If PLD starts affecting liver function or becomes too painful, surgery may be needed. However, cysts can reoccur after surgery.

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People with PLD are born with it, but usually do not have large cysts until they are adults. Polycystic liver disease is genetic. When it is found in one family member, all family members should be tested. PLD may be detected using an ultrasound or CT scan. It is more common in women than men.

Most people with PLD also have polycystic kidney disease (PKD), which are cysts in the kidneys that can cause high blood pressure and kidney failure. Sometimes a liver transplant and a kidney transplant may be necessary.