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A LIVER-FRIENDLY QUESADILLA RECIPE AND EXPERT ADVICE ON BILIARY ATRESIA

*A delicious, nutrient-packed quesadilla recipe to support liver health —
plus Julie Bonn, M.D.'s guidance on early diagnosis and treatment of
biliary atresia.*

By Julie Bonn, M.D. | Published on February 26, 2025

8 min read

For families navigating a rare disease diagnosis, finding the right support and information can be a daunting challenge. During Rare Disease Week, we recognize the importance of raising awareness and fostering community for those living with conditions like biliary atresia (BA), a rare pediatric liver disease.



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Julie Bonn, M.D., is an assistant professor in the Department of

improving care and education for families affected by BA. In an interview with *The Educated Patient*, she shares insights on early diagnosis, treatment options and the importance of specialized care. She also highlights the crucial role of advocacy in driving research and support for families, particularly through organizations like [Biliary Atresia Research & Education \(BARE\)](#) and the [American Liver Foundation \(ALF\)](#).

In honor of Rare Disease Day (February 28), we're also featuring a nutritious and easy-to-make meal that aligns with liver-friendly eating. [Originally](#) included in the ALF's 30-day meal plan, this Black Bean with Corn Quesadilla recipe is a delicious and balanced option packed with fiber, plant-based protein and essential nutrients.

Nutrition Facts Per Serving (1)

- Calories: 301
- Total fat: 11 grams
- Saturated fat: 3 grams
- Trans fat: 0 grams
- Sodium: 485 milligrams
- Total carbohydrate: 38 grams
- Dietary fiber: 7 grams
- Sugars: 5 grams
- Protein: 14 grams

Black Bean with Corn Quesadilla

Ingredients:

- olive oil
- ⅓ cup minced red onion
- 1 teaspoon minced garlic
- ½ teaspoon chili powder
- ⅓ cup black beans, fresh or canned (low sodium)
- 2 teaspoons lime juice
- 2 whole wheat tortillas
- ⅔ cup low-fat mozzarella (3 ounces)
- 1 tablespoon minced pickled jalapeños (optional)

Instructions:

1. Heat nonstick skillet and add corn. Continue to stir occasionally until kernels begin to brown; transfer corn to separate bowl.
 2. Heat 1 teaspoon olive oil in the skillet over medium heat until shimmering; add red onion and cook, stirring occasionally, until softened. Add garlic and chili powder and cook until fragrant (about 1 minute); stir in beans and cook until heated through.
 3. Return corn to skillet and mix; gently press mixture with spatula to lightly crush black beans. Transfer mixture back into the bowl, stirring in lime juice, and season to taste with salt-free seasoning.
 4. After wiping out the skillet, place one tortilla in and toast until soft and puffed slightly at edges. Flip tortilla and toast until puffed and slightly browned. Repeat to toast the second tortilla.
 5. Sprinkle ⅓ cup cheese, half the corn and bean mixture, and jalapeños to taste over half of the tortilla, leaving a ½-inch border around edge. Fold tortilla in half and press to flatten. Brush the surface lightly with olive oil
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6. Place both quesadillas in skillet, oiled sides down; cook over medium heat until crisp and well browned. Flip quesadillas and cook until the second sides are crisp and browned, 1 to 2 minutes longer. Cut in half and serve!

How is BA typically diagnosed, and what are some of the early signs parents or caregivers should look for?

Julie Bonn, M.D.: Biliary atresia is diagnosed through a combination of blood tests, an abdominal ultrasound, a liver biopsy and a procedure called a cholangiogram. Early signs to look out for are persistent jaundice, or yellowing of the skin and eyes, in newborns, and dark urine and acholic (white or clay-colored) stools.

What is the Kasai procedure, and why is it often the first-line treatment for infants with BA?

JB: The Kasai procedure, or hepatoportoenterostomy, is a surgery in which the damaged or malfunctioning gallbladder and bile ducts are removed and a loop of intestine is connected to the liver as a pathway to drain bile from the liver. Restoring bile flow from the liver is the most important part of early treatment for BA and improving the health of the liver and patient. If bile drainage cannot be restored, the liver gets severely damaged and can progress to end-stage liver disease within months.

What are some of the biggest challenges patients and families face when managing BA, especially in accessing specialized care?

JB: Overall BA is a rare disease, with only one in 10,000 to 15,000 infants being affected. Pediatricians and newborns

is *not* biliary atresia. With BA, it is important to find a pediatric hospital with a specialized Liver Care Center who is experienced in diagnosing and treating BA.

What advice would you give to new parents whose child has just been diagnosed with BA?

JB: Ask for help – questions, resources and support! It can be very overwhelming and a lot to process with a new BA diagnosis. I always empower patients and families that there are no bad or silly questions. We are here to help guide you through the BA journey. Often social workers or psychologists can be helpful to process the many emotions that can be faced with a new diagnosis. Finally, the ALF has an excellent library of resources and educational materials at [American Liver Foundation](#) as well as a Facebook group for pediatric liver disease: [Life with Pediatric Liver Disease: American Liver Foundation Support Group](#).

How can patients and families get involved in advocacy efforts for BA and other rare liver diseases?

JB: BARE is a national organization founded by two BA moms motivated to make an impact and drive change. Their mission is to drive research and education for better outcomes in treatment and management in the BA community. They have multiple ways to get involved and also have a BARE Connection Network of patients and families.

What do you wish more people understood about rare diseases like BA, especially in terms of research, awareness and access to care?

JB: Rare diseases are difficult because they are all that matter to the families and providers affected, but are often never heard of by most people. Research on rare diseases is often difficult due to the relatively small number of patients affected, and it's difficult to obtain funding to conduct studies and raise the appropriate awareness. Given the small number of patients, not every state or even every part of the country has experts in BA, therefore making access to appropriate care very challenging as well.

How can Rare Disease Day help bring more attention to conditions like BA and improve support for families affected?

JB: Friday, February 28, is Rare Disease Day, which helps bring awareness to under-recognized rare diseases including BA and their profound impact on patients' and families' lives. Rare Disease Day is committed to working to ensure everyone has access to the appropriate diagnosis and treatments for rare diseases, a problem that is present in the BA community.

In addition to liver-healthy recipes, the ALF offers a simple liver health quiz, available in [English](#) and [Spanish](#). To learn more about liver health, including education, awareness and screening, visit [Think Liver Think Life](#), and to help researchers find better treatments and cures for liver diseases, visit [ALF's Patient Registry](#).



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