

Health Bulletin

NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND MENTAL HYGIENE

#98 in a series of Health Bulletins on issues of pressing interest to all New Yorkers



Your Liver Keeps You Healthy: Protect It.





What is the liver?

Your liver is an organ about the size of a football, located under the right side of your rib cage. You can't see or feel your liver, but it performs some of your body's most important jobs, including acting as a:

- **Filter:** Cleansing dangerous toxins from your body
- **Factory:** Changing nutrients from food into fuel that helps "power" you

An unhealthy liver can cause many health problems.

What is hepatitis?

One of the most common liver health problems is hepatitis, which means inflammation of the liver. If you have hepatitis for a long time, your liver can develop serious problems, such as:

1. **Scars:** dead liver cells
2. **Fibrosis:** tough bands of fibrous tissue in your liver
3. **Cirrhosis:** advanced scarring and fibrosis, which can cause your liver to harden, shrink and eventually shut down
4. **Liver Cancer:** tumors in the liver



Healthy Liver



Scars



Fibrosis



Cirrhosis



Liver Cancer

But you probably won't feel any liver pain as these problems happen.

What causes hepatitis?

The most common types of hepatitis are caused by **viruses**, **fatty liver** and excessive **alcohol**.

ALCOHOL

- Is one of the greatest stresses to your liver.
- Can cause fat to build up in the liver.
- Can damage or kill liver cells.

How much is too much?

For men, five or more drinks in a two-hour period, or more than 14 drinks in a week.

For women and people 65 and older, four or more drinks in a two-hour period, or more than seven drinks in a week.

How to Stay Healthy

- Don't go over the recommended drink limit.
- For people with hepatitis, it is safest not to drink alcohol at all.

FATTY LIVER

- Results from fat building up in the liver.
 - Alcohol
 - High cholesterol or triglycerides
- Can be caused by:
 - Being overweight
 - Poor diet
 - Family history
 - Diabetes
 - Certain medications

How to Stay Healthy

- Lose weight if you are overweight.
- Eat a healthy diet that is rich in fiber and low in trans fat and sugar.
- Avoid excessive alcohol.
- Exercise at least two or three times a week for 30 minutes each time.

VIRAL HEPATITIS

Hepatitis A (Hep A)

- Is passed from one person to another through infected feces, usually when someone eats or drinks contaminated food or water.
- Typically lasts less than two months but can make you very sick.
- Can be prevented with a vaccine. You need **two** doses to be protected for life.



How to Stay Healthy

- Get vaccinated.
- Wash your hands often with soap and hot water.

Hepatitis B (Hep B)

- Is passed between people through blood or sexual contact or during childbirth.
- Can be a short-term infection. If your body fights it off, you become immune for life.
- Can also become a chronic or life-long infection that can progress to serious liver disease.
- Can be treated and controlled.
- Is preventable if you get the vaccine. You need **three** doses to be protected for life.



- If you were born in a country where Hep B is common, get tested.
- If you have Hep B, get medical care.
- Get vaccinated.
- Make sure your baby gets the first Hep B vaccine at birth before leaving the hospital.
- Practice safe sex.
- Avoid blood contact with others.

Hepatitis C (Hep C)

- Is passed between people through blood contact.
- Usually becomes a chronic or life-long infection, which can progress to serious liver disease.
- Has no preventative vaccine.
- Can re-infect you. You are never immune to Hep C. So even if you are treated and cured, you can get infected with Hep C again.
- Can be treated and cured.

- If you have ever injected drugs, get tested.
- If you were born between 1945 and 1965, get tested.
- If you have Hep C, get medical care.
- Never share any drug use equipment.
- Avoid blood contact with others.

Are there signs or symptoms of hepatitis?

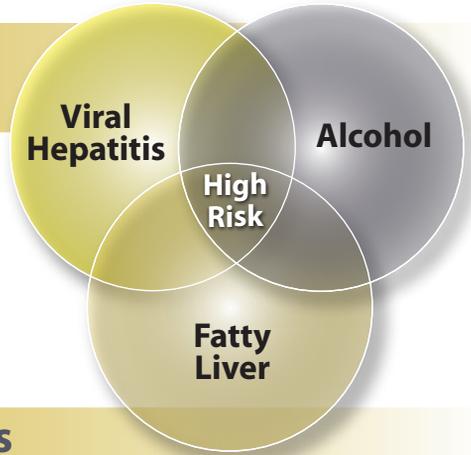
There are often no signs or symptoms of hepatitis until your liver is seriously damaged.

If you do have signs or symptoms, they may be:

- Flu-like symptoms
- Fatigue or trouble sleeping
- Loss of appetite, nausea or weight loss
- Jaundice (yellowing of the skin or the whites of the eyes)
- Dark urine or light colored stools
- Pain or swelling in the liver area (under the right rib)

Can I have more than one type of hepatitis?

Yes – having two or more types of hepatitis increases your risk of developing serious liver damage.



What are the health risks of severe liver damage?

If your liver is seriously damaged, you are at increased risk for many health problems.

The most common are:

- Easy bruising or bleeding
- Fluid build-up in the abdomen
- Enlarged veins in the esophagus (the tube that connects the throat and stomach) that may cause severe bleeding
- Confusion, trouble concentrating, mental health issues or coma
- Liver failure
- Liver cancer

Severe liver damage can even lead to death.

Reduce your risk by taking good care of your liver now. For more information, call 311, visit nyc.gov/health/hepatitis or text LIVER to 877-877.



Keep your liver healthy.

- Avoid drinking excessive alcohol.
- Get tested for Hep B or Hep C if you are at risk.
- Get vaccinated for Hep A and B.
- Maintain a healthy body weight: Exercise and eat nutritious food low in fat, sugar and salt.

Treatment for hepatitis is getting better every day.

- Get medical care.
- Review with your doctor all your “over-the-counter” and prescribed medications to choose those best for your liver.
- Always speak to your doctor before taking “natural medicine,” vitamins, herbs or supplements. Some can be harmful to your liver.

Resources

- New York City Health Department: nyc.gov/health/hepatitis
- American Liver Foundation: LiverFoundation.org
- Centers for Disease Control: CDC.gov/hepatitis

**DIAL
311**

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VOLUME 13, NUMBER 1

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Protect It.

DIAL
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Scan to view the NYC Health Department
Hepatitis homepage or text LIVER to
877-877 for your next steps.