

Cirrhosis of the liver

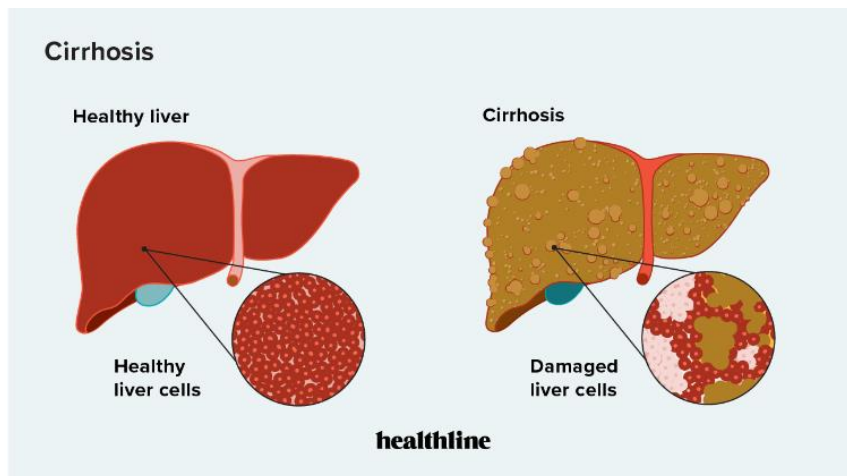
Summary

Cirrhosis is a type of liver damage where healthy cells are replaced by scar tissue.

Common causes include excessive drinking of alcohol, hepatitis B and C virus infections, and fatty liver that's caused by obesity and diabetes.

Drinking alcohol if you already have another condition that causes liver damage can increase your risk of cirrhosis.

Treatment aims to halt liver damage, manage the symptoms and reduce the risk of complications.



Some of the noticeable symptoms of cirrhosis [include Trusted Source:](#)

- decreased appetite
- fatigue
- unintentional weight loss
- mild pain on the upper right side of your abdomen
- nausea
- vomiting
- enlarged or swollen veins ([varices or varicose veins](#))

More serious symptoms include:

- yellow discoloration of your skin and eyes ([jaundice](#))
- [confusion](#) and difficulty thinking clearly
- bruising or bleeding easily
- very itchy skin
- urine that looks darker than usual
- abdominal swelling ([ascites](#))
- swelling of your legs ([edema](#))
 - Confusion, drowsiness or slurred speech.

When to see a doctor

Make an appointment with your health care provider if you have any of the symptoms listed above.

[Request an appointment](#)

Risk factors

- **Drinking too much alcohol.** Excessive alcohol consumption is a risk factor for cirrhosis.
- **Being overweight.** Being obese increases your risk of conditions that may lead to cirrhosis, such as nonalcoholic fatty liver disease and nonalcoholic steatohepatitis.
- **Having viral hepatitis.** Not everyone with chronic hepatitis will develop cirrhosis, but it's one of the world's leading causes of liver disease.

Complications

Complications of cirrhosis can include:

- **High blood pressure in the veins that supply the liver.** This condition is known as portal hypertension. Cirrhosis slows the regular flow of blood through the liver. This increases pressure in the vein that brings blood to the liver.
- **Swelling in the legs and abdomen.** The increased pressure in the portal vein can cause fluid to accumulate in the legs, called edema, and in the abdomen, called ascites. Edema and ascites also may happen if the liver can't make enough of certain blood proteins, such as albumin.
- **Enlargement of the spleen.** Portal hypertension can cause the spleen to trap white blood cells and platelets. This makes the spleen swell, a condition known as splenomegaly. Fewer white blood cells and platelets in your blood can be the first sign of cirrhosis.
- **Bleeding.** Portal hypertension can cause blood to be redirected to smaller veins. Strained by the extra pressure, these smaller veins can burst, causing serious bleeding. Portal hypertension also may cause enlarged veins, called varices (VAIR-uh-seez), in the esophagus or the stomach. These varices also may lead to life-threatening bleeding. If the liver can't make enough clotting factors, this also can contribute to continued bleeding.
- **Infections.** If you have cirrhosis, your body may have a hard time fighting infections. Ascites can lead to bacterial peritonitis, a serious infection.
- **Malnutrition.** Cirrhosis may make it more difficult for your body to process nutrients, leading to weakness and weight loss.
- **Buildup of toxins in the brain.** A liver damaged by cirrhosis can't clear toxins from the blood as well as a healthy liver can. These toxins can then build up in the brain and cause mental confusion and difficulty concentrating. This is known as hepatic encephalopathy. With time, hepatic encephalopathy can progress to unresponsiveness or coma.

- **Jaundice.** Jaundice occurs when the diseased liver doesn't remove enough bilirubin, a blood waste product, from your blood. Jaundice causes yellowing of the skin and whites of the eyes and darkening of urine.
- **Bone disease.** Some people with cirrhosis lose bone strength and are at greater risk of fractures.
- **Increased risk of liver cancer.** A large proportion of people who develop liver cancer have pre-existing cirrhosis.
- **Acute-on-chronic cirrhosis.** Some people end up experiencing multiorgan failure. Researchers now believe this is a complication in some people who have cirrhosis. However, they don't fully understand what causes it.
- Confusion, drowsiness or slurred speech.

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Treatment for cirrhosis

Treatment for cirrhosis varies based on what caused it, what symptoms you are experiencing, and how far the disorder has progressed. Treatments include medications, lifestyle changes, and surgery.

Medications

Depending on the cause of cirrhosis, your doctor may recommend certain medications, such as beta-blockers or [nitrates](#) (for [portal hypertension](#)). They may also recommend antibiotics or medications to treat hepatitis.

Lifestyle changes

If your cirrhosis is a result of alcohol consumption, your doctor will most likely advise you to stop drinking.

They may also recommend that you lose weight if they consider it medically necessary.

If you are dealing with ascites, a low sodium diet may also be recommended.

Surgery

If cirrhosis has progressed to the point where treatment isn't enough, one of the last options is a [liver transplant](#).

Associated Procedures

[CT scan](#)

[Liver biopsy](#)

[Liver function tests](#)

[Liver transplant](#)

[Magnetic resonance elastography](#)

[MRI](#)

[Ultrasound](#)

[Show fewer associated procedures](#) ^

Prevention

Lower your risk of cirrhosis by taking these steps to care for your liver:

- **Do not drink alcohol if you have cirrhosis.** If you have liver disease, you should not drink alcohol.
- **Eat a healthy diet.** Choose a diet that's full of fruits and vegetables. Select whole grains and lean sources of protein. Cut down on the amount of fatty and fried foods you eat.
- **Maintain a healthy weight.** Too much body fat can damage your liver. Talk to your health care provider about a weight-loss plan if you are obese or overweight.
- **Reduce your risk of hepatitis.** Sharing needles and having unprotected sex can increase your risk of hepatitis B and C. Ask your provider about hepatitis vaccinations.

References




[References](#)

References



References



- [Cirrhosis 2020](#) , National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive Kidney Diseases
- ✓ [Cirrhosis](#) , Mayo Clinic
- [Fatty Liver Disease](#) , Gastroenterological Society of Australia

<https://www.healthline.com/health/cirrhosis#outlook>