

Easy B's

What Is ALT?



Hepatitis C Support Project
www.hcvadvocate.org



A healthy ALT level is anywhere from 30 to 40 units per liter

There are several kinds of blood tests that tell a doctor if your liver is damaged. One of the most common tests measures the level of *alanine aminotransferase (ALT for short)* in your blood. ALT are chemicals that liver cells release when they are damaged or sick. High levels of ALT can be caused by many things like alcohol, drugs, toxins, and germs such as the hepatitis B virus.

Unfortunately, ALT is not a perfect test for liver damage. It shows only if there was liver cell damage taking place the day your blood was tested for ALT. You may already have liver damage, but unless your ALT is elevated the day of your test, no one would know how much damage had occurred unless a sample of your liver tissue (called a liver biopsy) was examined.

Doctors generally will treat patients if their ALT levels are elevated twice above normal. This indicates there is ongoing liver damage that must be stopped. Elevated ALT levels also mean your immune system is actively fighting the hepatitis B infection.

It is important to remember:

- ◆ If your ALT level is high, it means something is currently damaging your liver.
- ◆ Most hepatitis B-infected people with normal ALT levels will not get sick, but some can still have liver damage from past infection activity.
- ◆ If you have normal ALT levels, a doctor will usually not treat you unless a liver biopsy reveals you already have serious liver damage, such as cirrhosis.