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THE LIVER

The information in this brochure is designed to help you understand and manage HBV and HCV and is not intended as medical advice. All persons with HBV or HCV should consult a medical practitioner for diagnosis and treatment of HBV or HCV.

This information is provided by the Hepatitis C Support Project, a non-profit organization for HBV and HCV education, support and advocacy.

Contact your local health department or one of the following agencies for more information on hepatitis:

The Hepatitis C Support Project
www.hcvadvocate.org
www.hbvadvocate.org

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THE BASICS



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LIVER BASICS

The liver is the largest organ inside the body. It weighs around 3 pounds in the average-sized man, and it is about the size of a football. It is located behind the ribcage on the upper right side near the stomach.

WHAT DOES THE LIVER DO?

The liver performs over 500 functions that keep your body healthy:

- Plays a role in processing food, including sugar, fat and protein.
- Keeps you healthy by fighting off illness and disease.
- Processes everything you eat, drink, breathe and even what you can get on your skin.
- Stores certain vitamins and iron.
- Makes chemicals to help the blood to clot.



One of the most amazing things the liver can do is regrow its own tissue. For example, if they removed half of your liver—it would grow back in a few weeks!

SYMPTOMS OF LIVER DISEASE

The liver is called a “non-complaining organ” so even if the liver is damaged you may not know it. Some common symptoms of a damaged liver are feeling tired (fatigue—mild to severe), headaches, muscle aches and pains, and feeling sick to your stomach.

Many things can harm your liver. Too much alcohol, fumes and certain drugs can cause liver damage. Viruses such as hepatitis B and hepatitis C can also harm your liver. When the liver is damaged it can become scarred. In time, the liver may become so scarred that blood is unable to flow through it. This can lead to very serious health problems, including death. When your liver is this damaged a liver transplant may be needed. Unfortunately, there is a shortage of donated livers so only about one in three people who need a new liver are able to get one.

KEEPING THE LIVER HEALTHY

The good news is that there are many things you can do to keep your liver healthy if you have hepatitis B or hepatitis C. One of the most important things you can do is to stop drinking. If you can't stop drinking cut down on the amount of alcohol you drink and seek professional help.



More Tips to Keep the Liver Healthy:

- See your doctor for regular check-ups.
- Get protected against hepatitis A and hepatitis B—your doctor or nurse will tell you if you need to be vaccinated.
- Eat a healthy and well-balanced diet that is low in fat, salt and sugar.
- Cut back or stop using street drugs.
- Talk to your doctor or nurse about any drugs you are taking including herbs, vitamins, supplements and even medicines bought in a store.
- Be careful about mixing any drugs, especially with alcohol.
- Stay away from raw or undercooked shellfish.
- Talk to your doctor or nurse about whether you need to be treated for hepatitis B or hepatitis C.

For most people, the damage caused by hepatitis B and hepatitis C takes many years. By following these simple tips to stay healthy, you may be able to prevent further damage to your liver.

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