

This is a liver disease characterised by a gradual annihilation of the liver cells. These cells are progressively replaced with fibrous tissue, which then leads to hardening.

What to look for ...

Usually no symptoms appear until the disease has entered the late stages as the disease tends to come on gradually. When they occur, symptoms can include:

- nausea, vomiting, and loss of appetite.
- unusual gain or loss of weight.
- yellow coloration of the skin and eyes (see Jaundice).
- dark urine.
- bloody, black stools, or unusually light-colored stools.
- vomiting of blood.
- thinning hair
- abdominal swelling.
- itching.
- swollen feet or legs.
- red palms.
- sleep disturbances and confusion.
- fatigue or loss of stamina.
- enlarged breasts in men.
- loss of sex drive and menstrual problems in women.
- spider like blood vessels on chest and shoulders.
- in severe cases, mental disturbances

With Cirrhosis, the liver eventually loses ability to function as required. With severe damage, the patient cannot function mentally and coma and possibly death can result. As well as this, because the blood cannot flow through the liver due to the scarring, it collects in the veins and they may burst under the enormous pressure. In some cases this pressure becomes so great that the vessels rupture.

Once the liver is damaged through cirrhosis, it cannot be cured except through a liver transplant. It can often be helped in the early stages though.

The wellness of the liver is important as it has many duties to perform for the proper functioning of the body. The liver is the largest of the body organs and performs the following essential functions-

- detoxifies and rids the body of harmful chemicals, alcohol, caffeine by acting like a filter.
- produces bile which it stores in the gall bladder. Bile is then released into the small intestine as needed to help break down fatty foods.
- regulates the composition of the blood
- traps old red blood cells
- helps remove virus and bacteria (it performs this function as part of the immune system).

With so many tasks to perform it is essential to have a fully functioning and healthy liver however, it can still function but not quite as effectively. The liver possesses an amazing ability to repair itself, especially if the cirrhosis is caught in the early stages and the causes of it's malfunction have been removed.

The parts of the liver that are scarred will never be returned to normal. If the causes of cirrhosis are not removed and more and more cells are affected, the rest of the healthy cells are left to do all the work - this is where problems will become obvious. This is why it's important to identify the underlying causes as soon as possible and begin taking steps to eliminate them.

Causes

The most common cause of Cirrhosis is the excessive consumption of alcohol over a long period. Other possible causes include viruses, genetic deficiencies, prolonged obstruction of bile flow, and long periods of exposure to drugs and other toxic substances.

The link between alcohol and cirrhosis is well documented. Studies show that while moderate drinking may actually help prevent strokes and heart disease, heavy drinking has a clearly harmful effect on the liver.

Excessive drinking almost inevitably causes some liver damage, but it does not always lead to cirrhosis however the liver can become inflamed. This only lasts for a week or two but can eventually lead to Cirrhosis. Even light drinkers who go on a binge for several days can develop a condition known as fatty liver which causes the cells of the liver to become swollen. This condition can be painful and can cause the eyes to take on a yellow appearance.

Hepatitis is the next most common cause of cirrhosis after alcoholism the most frequent cause of cirrhosis is hepatitis, which inflames the liver.

Traditional Treatment

Treating the cause of cirrhosis is the best way to recovery from this disease.

Remedies are dependant on the cause of the disease and what stage it is up to. If alcohol is the cause of your cirrhosis you must stop drinking immediately. If you continue to drink after you have been diagnosed with cirrhosis, there is more chance of the condition becoming fatal.

Liver transplants are available to people as a last resort and there are certain people who are not permitted to undergo this operation. People whose cirrhosis is due to alcohol abuse must abstain from alcohol for a period of time before this operation will be performed.

Dietary Considerations

Good nutrition can help the liver. Freshly squeezed juices from carrots, beetroot and celery, carrot and apple, grapefruit and pear juice. Eat more leafy green vegetables, tossed salads including cabbage rocket lettuce, dandelion and thistle leaves with a dressing of olive oil and lemon juice. Alfalfa sprouts, beans, broccoli, brussel sprouts and all the range of leafy Chinese and English spinach's.

Protein is needed for the healthy functioning of the liver but it is important to monitor how much you are consuming - too little is as bad as too much. Check with a doctor or nutritionist for the amount of protein that's right for you.

Also check with your doctor about the taking of high doses of vitamins as these can be harmful to your liver. (The liver has to filter substances that are taken into the body).

Prevention

- Do not drink to excess and if you have been diagnosed with Cirrhosis stop drinking immediately.
- Avoid uncooked shellfish.
- Avoid mixing alcohol and drugs.
- Avoid exposure to industrial chemicals, which can enter the bloodstream and cause liver damage.
- Maintain a healthy diet.
- Be careful to avoid contracting hepatitis.

When to seek further professional advice

- you notice any of the symptoms listed in the description section.