

DIGESTIVE HEALTHCARE OF GEORGIA

Patient Education: Liver Disease

What it is, how it's evaluated, treatment options, and what to do next

What is liver disease?

"Liver disease" is a general term for many conditions that injure the liver or interfere with how it works. The liver helps process nutrients and medicines, remove waste, and perform other important functions. Some liver conditions are temporary; others can cause lasting inflammation or scarring.

Common causes include:

- **Metabolic dysfunction-associated steatotic liver disease (MASLD):** Fat builds up in the liver in association with metabolic risk factors. If inflammation and liver-cell injury develop, the condition is called **metabolic dysfunction-associated steatohepatitis (MASH)**. These terms replaced the older names NAFLD and NASH.
- **Alcohol-associated liver disease:** Liver injury related to alcohol use.
- **Viral hepatitis:** Liver inflammation caused by viruses such as hepatitis B or C.
- **Autoimmune, inherited, or bile-duct conditions.**
- **Medicine or supplement-related liver injury.**

Long-term injury can lead to **fibrosis** (scarring) and, in more advanced cases, **cirrhosis**. Cirrhosis is significant scarring that can interfere with liver function and cause complications. Not everyone with liver disease develops cirrhosis. [1, 2, 3]

What symptoms can occur?

Many people with early liver disease have **no symptoms**. When symptoms do occur, they can include tiredness, nausea, reduced appetite, discomfort in the upper-right abdomen, or itching. More advanced disease may cause yellowing of the skin or eyes (jaundice), swelling in the abdomen or legs, easy bruising, or confusion. These symptoms can have other causes, so evaluation is important. [2, 3]

How is liver disease found?

A clinician will ask about your symptoms, health history, family history, alcohol use, medicines and supplements, and metabolic health. They may examine you for signs of liver disease. Tell your provider honestly about alcohol and all medicines or supplements; this information helps guide testing and care.

Evaluation may include:

- **Blood tests** to assess liver enzymes and liver function, check blood counts, or look for infections and other causes. An abnormal liver enzyme result can signal a need for evaluation, but it does not by itself identify the cause or show how much scarring is present.
- **Imaging**, such as ultrasound, CT, or MRI, to examine the liver and nearby structures.

- **Noninvasive fibrosis assessment**, such as a calculation using routine lab results or elastography, which estimates liver stiffness and can help assess scarring.
- **Additional targeted blood tests** for viral, autoimmune, inherited, or other conditions, depending on your history and initial results.
- **Liver biopsy in selected cases** when the diagnosis or degree of liver injury is unclear or a tissue sample is needed. Many people do not need a biopsy. [3, 4]

Testing is tailored to the suspected condition. A normal or mildly abnormal result does not always settle the question, so your clinician may recommend follow-up testing.

How is liver disease treated?

Treatment depends on the cause and how much liver injury is present. The goal is to treat the underlying condition, prevent further injury, and monitor or manage complications.

Depending on the diagnosis, care may include:

- **MASLD/MASH:** A plan to support sustainable nutrition, physical activity, and weight management when appropriate, and to address conditions such as diabetes, high blood pressure, or abnormal cholesterol. Some people who meet specific criteria may be considered for clinician-directed medicines. Treatment choices depend on the diagnosis, fibrosis assessment, eligibility, and individual risks. [5, 6]
- **Alcohol-associated liver disease:** Avoiding alcohol is important; your clinician can help arrange support for stopping safely and addressing alcohol use. If you may be physically dependent on alcohol, seek medical guidance rather than stopping suddenly without help.
- **Hepatitis B or C:** Antiviral treatment may be appropriate. Treatment depends on the virus and your test results; hepatitis C can often be cured with medication. [7]
- **Autoimmune or bile-duct disease:** Specific medicines or procedures may be recommended.
- **Medicine- or supplement-related injury:** Your clinician may adjust or stop a suspected cause. **Do not stop prescribed medicine or start “liver cleanse” products without medical advice.**
- **Cirrhosis or its complications:** Care may include medicines, procedures, regular monitoring, or referral to a liver specialist. Advanced liver failure may require evaluation for liver transplantation. [8]

Your care team may also review vaccinations, nutrition, alcohol use, and whether you need screening for complications. Ask which steps are appropriate for your particular diagnosis.

What are the next steps?

1. **Arrange an appointment** if you have been told you have abnormal liver tests, liver fat, hepatitis, or possible liver scarring—or if you have symptoms that concern you.
2. **Bring your test results** and a list of all prescriptions, over-the-counter medicines, vitamins, and supplements.
3. **Be ready to discuss** alcohol use, medical conditions, family history, weight changes, and possible exposure to hepatitis.
4. **Ask your provider:** What is the most likely cause? Do I need more tests? Is there evidence of scarring? What treatment or lifestyle changes are appropriate? When should I repeat tests?

5. **Follow the monitoring plan.** Liver disease may require repeat blood tests or imaging even when you feel well.

When to seek urgent medical care

Seek emergency care now for vomiting blood or material that looks like coffee grounds, black tarry stools, new confusion or extreme sleepiness, fainting, or severe or rapidly worsening abdominal pain or swelling.

Get prompt medical advice for new yellowing of the skin or eyes, increasing abdominal or leg swelling, persistent vomiting, or rapidly worsening symptoms.

Set up an appointment

Call Digestive Healthcare of Georgia to set up an appointment with a provider. Contact the office serving your area:

- Atlanta: **(404) 355-3200**
- Cartersville or Jasper: **(706) 253-7340**
- Fayetteville: **(770) 719-3240**
- Newnan: **(678) 326-4812**
- Ellijay: **(706) 253-5514**
- Woodstock, Marietta, or Canton: **(404) 425-5570**

The practice lists appointments by arrangement. Call to confirm the appropriate location and appointment availability. [9]

Sources

[1] National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (NIDDK). *Liver Disease*.
<https://www.niddk.nih.gov/health-information/liver-disease>

[2] NIDDK. *Cirrhosis*.
<https://www.niddk.nih.gov/health-information/liver-disease/cirrhosis>

[3] NIDDK. *Diagnosis of Cirrhosis*.
<https://www.niddk.nih.gov/health-information/liver-disease/cirrhosis/diagnosis>

[4] NIDDK. *Diagnosis of NAFLD & NASH* (also discusses the updated names MASLD and MASH).
<https://www.niddk.nih.gov/health-information/liver-disease/nafl-d-nash/diagnosis>

[5] American Association for the Study of Liver Diseases (AASLD). *Clinical Assessment and Management of Metabolic Dysfunction-Associated Steatotic Liver Disease*.
<https://www.aasld.org/practice-guidelines/clinical-assessment-and-management-metabolic-dysfunction-associated-st>

[6] AASLD. *AASLD Announces Update to MASLD Practice Guidance: Semaglutide Therapy for MASH* (November 7, 2025).
<https://www.aasld.org/aasld-announces-update-metabolic-dysfunction-associated-steatotic-liver-disease-masld-pract>

[7] NIDDK. *Treatment for Cirrhosis* (includes treatment information for viral hepatitis and other underlying causes).

<https://www.niddk.nih.gov/health-information/liver-disease/cirrhosis/treatment>

[8] NIDDK. *Treatment for Cirrhosis*.

<https://www.niddk.nih.gov/health-information/liver-disease/cirrhosis/treatment>

[9] Digestive Healthcare of Georgia. *Contacts & Locations*.

<https://digestivehealthcare.net/contact-locations/>

This handout is for general education and does not replace medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. Your provider can recommend care based on your symptoms, test results, and health history.