



ALCOHOL AND YOUR LIVER

Most people think that alcohol is fairly harmless and just something to be enjoyed. Other than a few ill-effects the next day, alcohol does not seem to have any long lasting effects. Not feeling any side effects from drinking does not mean that you are not risking chronic ill-health or lasting liver damage from alcohol-related liver disease.

The liver is your largest internal organ. Among hundreds of jobs, it has to deal with the alcohol you drink. If you are drinking too much, your liver has to literally soak up the punishment. With so few nerve endings to signal pain you will not know that your liver is complaining. The chances are that you will not feel anything happening until your liver has had enough. The harm to your liver at this stage will be severe – and could even be fatal.

PROCESS OF LIVER DAMAGE

Your liver can only handle a certain amount of alcohol in any given time (1 unit an hour). If you are drinking quickly and/or heavily your liver cells will have to work overtime to process the alcohol. When this is more than the liver can deal with, the excess is transported to the rest of your organs.

Fatty Liver:

- When the liver breaks down alcohol, it stores the fat in your liver
- Too much of this fat can build up if you drink more than the liver can cope with which leads to fatty liver disease
- Fatty livers can return to normal if you stop or reduce your drinking to within the sensible limit
- If you carry on drinking you run the risk of more serious damage
- **Encourage your liver to recover by stopping or cutting down on your drinking!**

Alcoholic hepatitis:

- If you have a fatty liver and continue to drink, you have up to a one in three chance of getting alcoholic hepatitis
- Your liver becomes puffy, swollen and tender
- Alcoholic hepatitis can happen to you at an early stage or after many years of excessive drinking
- **Most people can recover – only if they stop drinking completely!**



Fibrosis:

- Scar tissue which is generated to protect injured tissue from further damage may keep building up
- The scarring is known as fibrosis

Cirrhosis:

- The final stage of alcoholic liver disease
- Irregular bumps known as nodules replace the smooth liver tissue and the liver becomes harder
- The effect of this together with continued scarring from fibrosis means that the liver will run out of healthy cells to support normal functions
- This can lead to complete liver failure!
- **Your liver cannot recover! But you can prevent further damage being done and increase your survival rate if you stop drinking!**

By the time you have discovered you have cirrhosis your quality of life may be severely damaged as your liver will have stopped working efficiently. If you do continue to drink at this stage you will speed up the damage to your liver and rapidly increase your chances of dying.

The odds are one in ten that you will develop cirrhosis if you drink too much over a long period of time.