

ALCOHOL-RELATED LIVER DISEASE



The liver performs 500 functions. It removes toxins from the blood. It is the body's largest filter. It also makes bile to digest food, makes clotting factors to control bleeding, and helps our bodies fight infection.

The liver is the organ that processes alcohol, and it can only handle a small amount at one time. If you drink too much alcohol, the following things can happen:

- Extra fat build-up in the liver (fatty liver)
- Inflammation of liver tissue (alcoholic hepatitis)
- Scar tissue of the liver (cirrhosis), which is usually permanent
- Liver cancer

Approximately 88,000 Americans die each year due to drinking too much alcohol. Alcohol-related liver damage is one of the leading causes of cirrhosis.

Your age, weight, gender and overall health affect how your body can handle alcohol, so it is hard to know how much alcohol is safe for everyone. General guidelines to consider:

Lower Risk Drinking

Women: 1 drink per day
Men: 2 drinks per day

Higher Risk Drinking

Women: 2 or more drinks a day
Men: 3 or more drinks a day

What is One Drink?

Each of these drinks, in these amounts, has the same amount of alcohol. Beer and wine are not "safer" than hard liquor (spirits). Alcohol is alcohol. The amount is what matters. Mixing alcohol with other drinks (juices, seltzers) does not make it safer to drink.



What is Binge Drinking?

Binge drinking is when people drink a lot of alcohol in a short period of time. For women, having four or more drinks within two hours is binge drinking. For men, having five or more drinks within two hours is binge drinking. Binge drinking can cause permanent liver damage. Playing drinking games is just one thing that can lead to binge drinking.

What about medication and alcohol?



Never drink alcohol when taking any medicine that contains acetaminophen—this can cause liver failure. Acetaminophen can be found in Tylenol and 600 other medicines. Many prescription drugs have labels which clearly state not to mix them with alcohol. It is important that you read the directions for all medications—over-the-counter and prescription—and find out if there are warnings about drinking alcohol while taking them.

Are there people who should never drink alcohol?

Yes. For some people, drinking any alcohol can be very dangerous. You should never drink alcohol if:

- You have any other liver disease – alcohol can make it worse
- You are under 21 – not only is there risk for legal issues but also changes in brain development and possible liver damage.
- You are a recovering alcoholic
- You are pregnant

Where Can I Learn More?

For more information about alcohol, medications and liver health, visit the Centers for Disease Control (www.cdc.gov), the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (www.niaaa.nih.gov) and the Acetaminophen Awareness Coalition (www.KnowYourDose.org).

For more information about alcohol-related and other liver diseases:



LiverFoundation.org

1-800-GO-LIVER (1-800-465-4837)



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