

Alcohol-related Liver Disease and Hepatitis C

Alcohol-related liver disease is liver damage caused by alcohol misuse. Symptoms can include jaundice, nausea, confusion and vomiting blood. Alcohol is toxic to cells in the liver. Normally the liver is capable of regenerating but prolonged alcohol misuse reduces this ability.¹

Hepatitis C is a blood-borne virus which attacks the liver, causing cirrhosis (scarring) and damage. Hepatitis C compounds the damage caused by alcohol and accelerates liver disease.

People with hepatitis C often have other illnesses. Drawing on interviews with expert clinicians and patient organisations, the Hepatitis C Coalition has prepared a series of short factsheets on the relationship between Hepatitis C and associated diseases.

These factsheets were developed in the hope that stepping up efforts to address hepatitis C can present opportunities to address other health problems, and vice versa, achieving better services for patients and better efficiency for the NHS. **August 2015**

Prevalence

- Liver disease is the only major cause of death still increasing year-on-year and liver disease is the fifth 'big killer' in the UK, after heart, cancer, stroke and respiratory disease. Liver disease is now the third main cause of premature mortality, with the average age at death of 59²
- In 2014, 10,948 people died from liver disease in England. Alcohol-related liver disease accounts for 84% of liver related deaths^{3,4}
- The cost to the NHS of alcohol misuse has been estimated at £2.7billion each year²
- People who are dependent on alcohol are more likely to have used other substances, which can increase their risk of contracting hepatitis C

Alcohol-related liver disease - Health impact

There are three main stages of alcohol-related liver disease:¹

- Alcohol-related liver disease – drinking alcohol leads to a build-up of fats in the liver, this is reversible if the person doesn't drink alcohol for two weeks
- Alcohol-related hepatitis – the second, more serious, stage of liver disease occurs when alcohol misuse over time or bingeing causes the tissues of the liver to become inflamed
- Cirrhosis – the final stage of alcohol-related liver disease occurs when the liver has become scarred. This is not reversible but further damage can be prevented if alcohol is avoided in future
- Other consequences include internal bleeding, a build-up of toxins in the brain (encephalopathy), and fluid accumulation in the abdomen, kidney failure and liver cancer

Interaction with hepatitis C

- Hepatitis C compounds the impact of alcohol-related liver disease and people infected with hepatitis C are more vulnerable to alcohol-related damage³
- Some patients have problems with alcohol misuse, substance misuse, obesity and hepatitis C infection, creating several overlapping risks³
- In most cases, alcohol-misuse is the dominating factor in liver damage and will affect people's health earlier than hepatitis C

"In 2010, liver disease accounted for 141,600 potential years of life lost. In 2030, liver disease is likely to account for many times that number if the present trajectory continues. While alcohol consumption has decreased in the past few years, the historic trend is one of substantial increase. In 2012, the UK population consumed about twice as many units of alcohol per person as the population fifty years ago."⁵
- Chief Medical Officer of England, Prof Dame Sally Davies, March 2014

Treatment and complications

- People who misuse alcohol may have reduced hepatitis C treatment adherence rates
- Alcohol abuse causes more rapid damage to the liver than hepatitis C, so the first priority is to get the individual to stop drinking alcohol
- Alcohol services are predominantly community-based and include psycho-social interventions

Recent policy developments

- Since publishing the Alcohol Strategy in 2012, the Government has given local areas power to control licensed premises and ordered a review of current 'unit' based guidance on drinking⁶
- The Lancet Commission report on liver disease was published in November 2014⁷
- Public Health England is working with a group of stakeholders including patient charities, professional organisations and public health representatives to respond to the Lancet Commission and produce a Liver Disease Framework in summer 2015.⁸

Sources for further information:

- British Liver Trust www.britishlivertrust.org.uk
- The Lancet Commission www.thelancet.com/campaigns/liver
- Hepatitis C Trust www.hepctrust.org.uk
- NHS Choices [www.nhs.uk/conditions/liver_disease_\(alcoholic\)](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/liver_disease_(alcoholic))
www.nhs.uk/conditions/hepatitis-C/

Members of the Hepatitis C Coalition

The Hepatitis C Coalition is a group of leading clinicians, patient organisations and other interested parties committed to the reduction of morbidity and mortality associated with Hepatitis C and its eventual elimination. The Hepatitis C Coalition has funding from Gilead Sciences Ltd. The Coalition's report, 'A Vision for Change in Hepatitis C' is available online at www.hepc-coalition.uk

Members of the Hepatitis C Coalition

Addaction	British Viral Hepatitis Group	Liver4Life
BASL	Crime Reduction Initiatives	Sickle Cell Society
BASL Nurses Forum	Gilead Sciences	South Asian Health Foundation
BHIVA	Haemophilia Society	St Mungo's Broadway
Blenheim CDP	London Drug and Alcohol	TB Alert
British Liver Trust	Policy Forum	The Hepatitis C Trust
British Society of	London Joint Working Group	Turning Point
Gastroenterology	on Substance Use and	UK Thalassaemia Society
	Hepatitis C	

1 NHS Choices, *Alcohol-related liver disease*. Accessed May 2015

2 British Liver Trust, *Facts about liver disease*. Accessed May 2015

3 British Society of Gastroenterology, *Commissioning Report: Alcohol Dependency*, Accessed May 2015

4 Public Health England, *Liver disease: a preventable killer of young adults*. September 2014

5 Department of Health, *Annual Report of the Chief Medical Officer, Surveillance Volume 2012*. March 2014

6 Home Office, *The Government's Alcohol Strategy*. March 2012

7 The Lancet, *The Lancet Commission: Addressing liver disease in the UK*. November 2014

8 Hansard, *House of Commons written answer 224621*. 20 February 2015

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