



Liver disease: What's Your Risk?

If you read the heading above and your first reaction was 'I don't drink too much' – you need to think again. There are over 100 different forms of liver disease and only one has anything to do with alcohol. Unfortunately, what you think you know about liver disease may prevent you from seeing your own risk factors. Liver disease strikes Canadians of all ages with little to no warning. The good news is that many liver diseases can be prevented or successfully treated if identified early enough.

March is Liver Health Month and the Canadian Liver Foundation wants all Canadians to join us in our efforts to fight liver disease. The first step is to take a look at your own lifestyle and activities. Take our **What's Your Risk? Quiz** below and you might be surprised by what you learn.

YES **NO** **Have you ever experienced flu-like symptoms (e.g. fatigue, nausea, body aches) with no identified cause?**

Although many forms of liver disease do not have easily identifiable symptoms, your liver may give you a few warning signs. Flu-like symptoms, abdominal pain, jaundice (yellowing of the eyes and skin), fatigue and pale-coloured stool can be symptoms of an underlying liver disease.

YES **NO** **Do you take medication – prescription or over-the-counter – on a daily basis?**

The liver processes almost all medication including prescription drugs, vitamins, supplements and herbal remedies. Taking medication for an extended period of time or exceeding the recommended dose can lead to liver damage or even liver failure.



YES **NO** **Do you ever combine medications to treat an illness or take medication when you have been drinking alcohol?**

Since all medications meet in the liver, combining them can lead to problems. Many cold medications for instance contain acetaminophen and taking several of them at the same time could lead to an accidental overdose. Taking acetaminophen with alcohol (or when alcohol is still in your body) can lead to liver failure.

YES **NO** **Do you drink more than 2 alcoholic drinks a day if you're a woman or more than 3 alcoholic drinks if you're a man?**

Your gender, ethnicity and weight all play a role in how you metabolize alcohol. Consuming more than 2 to 3 drinks a day can lead to liver damage. Binge drinking can also be harmful to your liver.



YES NO
 Have you ever had unprotected sex?

The viruses that cause hepatitis B and C can be transmitted during sex. The hepatitis B virus is more infectious than HIV and can be spread via infected blood or body fluids. The hepatitis C virus is spread via contact with infected blood.

YES NO
 Do you have a tattoo or piercing?

Hepatitis B and hepatitis C viruses can be spread via contaminated inks or improperly sterilized tattoo or piercing equipment. Many licensed studios follow strict precautions to protect their clients but others may not.

YES NO
 Have you ever gotten sick after a trip?

The hepatitis A virus is spread via contaminated food or water and hepatitis B is transmitted through infected blood or body fluids. Both viruses can be contracted in Canada or while travelling to countries where these diseases are endemic. Both hepatitis A and B can be prevented through immunization.

YES NO
 Do you regularly eat high calorie, processed or fast foods and drink lots of pop or sports drinks?

A diet full of high calorie, sugar-filled foods can lead to fat buildup in the liver. Over time, this fat buildup can lead to inflammation – known as non-alcoholic fatty liver disease – and eventually to scarring (cirrhosis). The most severe form of fatty liver disease – known as non-alcoholic steatohepatitis or NASH – is fast becoming a leading cause of liver transplants.



YES NO
 Are you overweight? (Is your body mass index higher than 25?)

Obesity is the major cause of fatty liver disease. According to statistics, more than 50% of Canadians are overweight. It is estimated that 75% of obese individuals are at risk of developing a simple fatty liver and up to 23% of obese individuals are at risk of developing fatty liver with inflammation.

If you have any of the risk factors listed above, talk to your doctor and ask about having a liver test.

Even though you may not be experiencing any symptoms, simple blood tests may detect liver disease. To ensure that liver disease is caught as early as possible, the Canadian Liver Foundation recommends that liver tests be part of all annual physicals.

To learn more about liver health, the risk factors for liver disease and how you can get involved in the fight against liver disease, visit www.liver.ca or contact the Canadian Liver Foundation at 1-800-563-5483.

liver.ca

Canadian Liver Foundation
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