

# Cirrhosis in over 16s: assessment and management

Information for the public

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## Cirrhosis: the care you should expect

Cirrhosis is scarring of the liver that can stop it from working properly. You are more likely to get cirrhosis if you have been drinking a lot of alcohol over many years. You are also more at risk of getting cirrhosis if you have a hepatitis B or C infection, are living with overweight or obesity, or have type 2 diabetes.

Some causes of cirrhosis can be treated to stop the scarring from getting worse. It may also be possible to reduce the scarring if it is found early enough (for example, by cutting out drinking completely if this is what has caused the scarring).

If you have cirrhosis, you may need treatment for complications such as a build-up of fluid in the abdomen (ascites) that can become infected and varicose veins (varices) in the gullet or stomach that can cause life-threatening bleeding. You will also need to be checked regularly for liver cancer.

We want this guideline to make a difference to people with suspected or diagnosed cirrhosis by making sure that:

- cirrhosis is diagnosed early, so you can have treatment and – where possible – make changes (such as stopping drinking), to reduce the scarring or prevent it from getting worse, and to help with liver function
- you are referred to a liver specialist so you get the best treatment and support for the condition and its complications
- you are regularly checked for complications (such as varices or liver cancer)
- antibiotics are only used to prevent certain complications when they are really needed (for example, if an infection could make you very ill or delay your wait for a liver transplant).

## Making decisions together

Decisions about treatment and care are best when they are made together. Your health and care professionals should give you clear information, talk with you about your options and listen carefully to your views and concerns.

To help you make decisions, think about:

- What matters most to you – what do you want to get out of any treatment?
- What are you most worried about – are there risks or downsides to the treatment that worry you more than others?
- How will the treatment affect your day to day life?
- What happens if you don't want to have treatment?

If you need more support to understand the information you are given, tell your health professional.

Read more about [making decisions about your care](#).

## Where can I find out more?

The [NHS website](#) has more information about cirrhosis.

The following organisations can give you more advice and support:

- [Alcohol Change UK](#)
- [British Liver Trust](#), 0800 652 7330
- [Liver4Life](#), 0800 074 3494
- [Hepatitis B Trust](#), 07958 558510
- [The Hepatitis C Trust](#), 020 7089 6221

NICE is not responsible for the content of these websites.

To share an experience of care you have received, contact your local [Healthwatch](#).

We wrote this guideline with people who have been affected by cirrhosis and staff who treat and support them. All the decisions are based on the best research available.

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