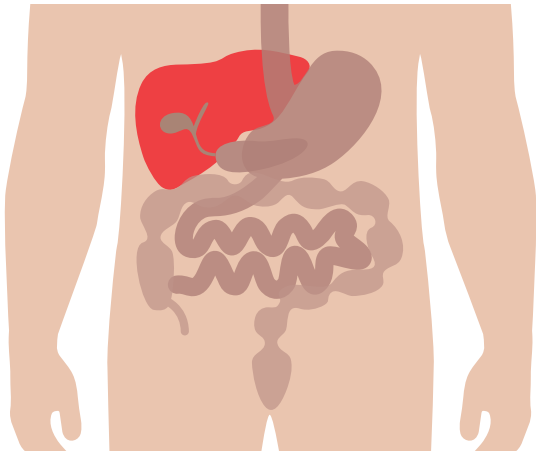


# Liver Wellness





## Why is the liver important?

Your liver is a vital organ that performs many essential functions. It's the largest solid organ in the body and is located under your rib cage on the upper right side. It weighs about three pounds and is shaped like a football that is flat on one side.

Your liver processes everything you eat, drink, breathe, and absorb through your skin. It manufactures hormones, proteins, and enzymes your body uses to function and fight off disease. It turns nutrients into energy your body can use and removes harmful substances from your blood.

## How can I maintain a healthy liver?

There are a number of things you can do to maintain the health of your liver. They include:

- eating a healthy diet
- limiting the amount of alcohol you drink
- correctly managing your medications
- avoiding inhaling or touching toxic substances

## How does a healthy diet help my liver?

Eating a healthy diet helps the liver perform efficiently and effectively. Conversely, eating an unhealthy diet can lead to liver disease. For example, a person with unhealthy eating habits is at higher risk of being overweight and having fatty liver disease. Fatty liver, characterized by an excessive accumulation of fat inside liver cells, makes it more difficult for the liver to function and can eventually lead to scarring of the liver.

## What constitutes a healthy diet?

To eat a healthy diet, keep in mind the following recommendations when planning your meals:

- Eat a diet that contains healthy amounts of protein, carbohydrates, and fats found in fish, meat, dairy, vegetables, grains, fruits and oils. For detailed information about how to build healthy meals, visit the website [ChooseMyPlate.gov](http://ChooseMyPlate.gov).
- Eat foods that have a lot of fiber, such as fresh fruits, vegetables, beans, and whole grain breads, rice and cereals.
- Limit foods that are high in saturated fats, which are solid at room temperature, like butter, stick margarine and shortening.
- Choose monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats such as olive oil, canola oil, corn oil, and sunflower oil are healthier.
- Limit processed foods and foods that have a lot of sugar or salt.

## How does alcohol affect my liver?

The liver breaks down alcohol so it can be eliminated from your body. Some of the by-products of this process are toxic chemicals that, in high concentration, trigger inflammation and injure liver cells. Drinking too much alcohol, either on a single occasion – known as binge drinking – or drinking a lot over time, can take a serious toll on your liver.

Liver damage can lead to the build up of fat in your liver (fatty liver), swelling or inflammation of your liver (alcoholic hepatitis), and/or severe scarring of your liver (cirrhosis).

## Is there a safe level of drinking?

According to the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, moderate drinking is one drink a day for women and two drinks a day for men. Each of these alcoholic beverages in the following amounts is considered one drink and contains the same amount of alcohol:



However, for people who have liver disease even a small amount of alcohol can make their disease worse.

## Why is managing my medications important to my liver health?

Remember that your liver processes everything you eat, drink, breathe, and absorb through your skin. This includes all the medicines you take:

- over-the-counter medicine
- prescription medicine
- vitamins
- dietary supplements
- alternative medicine (for example, herbs)

When medications are taken incorrectly — by taking too much, taking the wrong type, or by mixing them — your liver can be harmed. People who have liver disease need to be especially careful, as some medications may cause more damage to their liver or may not be processed normally.

For example, acetaminophen (common brand name Tylenol) is found in hundreds of different prescription and over-the-counter medications. Taking acetaminophen as directed is safe and effective. But taking more than recommended can lead to liver damage. In fact, overdose of acetaminophen is the leading cause of acute liver failure in the U.S. That's why it's so important to carefully read the label before taking any medication. In this case, you wouldn't want to take two or more medications that contain acetaminophen at the same time.

## How can I best manage my medications?

When you take medications, it's important to do the following:



- Learn as much as you can about the medicines you take.
- Read the label carefully.
- Follow the dosing instructions; take the right dose at the right time. And remember - more is not better!
- Know if the medication should be taken with food or after a meal and if there are any foods or drinks you need to avoid.
- Find out how your medications mix with each other and if there are things you should not take together.
- Mixing alcohol and medicines can be harmful, even if they're not taken at the same time; check with your pharmacist.
- Tell your doctor about all the medicines you take (prescription, over-the-counter, etc.) and check with him or her before making a change to your medication routine.

## **How can things I inhale or touch affect my liver?**

Because your liver processes what you breathe and absorb through your skin, toxins contained in cleaning products, aerosol sprays, insecticides and other chemicals can affect the health of your liver. Follow directions carefully when using these products to limit your exposure to toxins. Many of these products should be used in a well-ventilated room to limit how much you inhale. In addition, gloves should be worn where indicated so the products do not come into contact with your skin.

## **Keep your liver healthy!**

Your liver is a vital organ that performs functions essential to your health and well-being. Do your part to keep your liver healthy by following the suggestions outlined above. If you have questions about liver wellness, call the American Liver Foundation at 1-800-GO-LIVER or visit us on the Web at [liverfoundation.org](http://liverfoundation.org).



*Your Liver. Your Life.*

American Liver Foundation

LiverFoundation.org

**1-800-GO-LIVER**

(1-800-465-4837)

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