

Chronic Hepatitis C and Substance Use

Untreated hepatitis C may cause scarring, also called fibrosis, of your liver. When this affects a large part of the liver it causes cirrhosis. Cirrhosis may result in tiredness, problems with sleep, confusion, yellow skin and eyes, a bulging abdomen with fluid, poor blood clotting, and bleeding from the stomach and bowels. Late-stage cirrhosis is a life-threatening condition. There are treatments for the symptoms of this disease, but the only cure is liver transplantation. The number of individuals needing a transplant is greater than the number of donor livers available. This means that not all individuals can be helped by a transplant.

Individuals with hepatitis C who drink alcohol develop cirrhosis sooner than those who do not drink. If an individual with hepatitis C also has HIV then cirrhosis occurs faster when alcohol is used. Fatty liver disease, also called steatosis, has many causes including alcohol. Fatty liver disease may lead to cirrhosis even without hepatitis C. Liver cancer, also called hepatocellular carcinoma, may develop from hepatitis C, cirrhosis, and/or alcohol use.

How much alcohol is equal to one drink?

One alcoholic drink equals



Can or bottle of beer

Or



Glass of wine or a wine cooler

Or



Shot of liquor (by itself or in mixed drink)

Are you consuming too much alcohol?

Ask yourself the following questions:

1. How many days in a month do you drink alcohol?

- None
- 1-2 days per month
- 3-4 days per month
- 5-6 days per month
- 7-8 days per month
- More than 8 days per month

2. How many drinks do you drink on each of these days?

- None
- 1-2 drinks on each day
- 3-4 drinks on each day
- At least 5 drinks on each day

Even a small amount of alcohol can damage your liver when you have hepatitis C. If you drink at least five drinks per day on at least five days of the month then you are considered a binge drinker. Individuals who drink at least five drinks on at least seven days of the month are heavy drinkers. Both binge drinking and heavy drinking can lead to cirrhosis.

Consuming alcohol may cause heart problems, pancreas problems, and other cancers including mouth, throat, and breast. Drinking alcohol may also weaken the immune system, resulting in infections such as pneumonia and tuberculosis.