



## Encephalopathy (confusion)

A liver with decompensated cirrhosis also may not be able to get rid of toxic substances like ammonia (which comes from the intestines), and it may allow these substances to go into the brain and cause confusion. Besides confusion, toxins in the brain cause changes in your sleep, your mood, your concentration, and your memory. In severe cases, these toxins can even cause a coma. These changes are all symptoms of hepatic encephalopathy. If you have encephalopathy, you may have problems driving, writing, and performing other activities of daily living. Signs of encephalopathy are trembling and hand “flapping.” Your doctor might prescribe lactulose, a laxative syrup that makes your bowels move more often. The goal is to move the bowels two to three times a day, which helps get rid of ammonia.

If you are not acting like yourself, if you are confused, or if you are very sleepy, you should be taken to the emergency room immediately. These symptoms could be a sign of a serious medical problem. You should not drive when you have these symptoms.

## Jaundice (yellowing of the eyes and skin)

Bilirubin is a normal substance in the bloodstream, but when bilirubin levels are too high, there will be a yellowing of the eyes and skin called jaundice. People with jaundice also frequently have itching. A healthy liver helps regulate the bilirubin level in the body, but people with hepatitis and cirrhosis can develop high levels of bilirubin. Too much alcohol and some medicines can also lead to jaundice. If you suddenly develop jaundice, you should go to the emergency room immediately.

## What Can You Do About Your Cirrhosis?

**The most important thing you can do is protect your liver from further damage and follow the treatment prescribed by your provider. The following checklist is a guide to taking care of your liver and keeping you well.**

- I am not drinking any alcohol or using any drugs.
- I eat a well-balanced diet that is low in fat and includes enough protein. I cut down on salt (sodium), read food labels, and avoid canned or prepared foods, especially if I have ascites.
- I always take the medications that my provider has ordered for me. I know their names and purpose.
- I tell my provider if I am taking over-the-counter or herbal medications.
- I never let myself get constipated. If it happens, I tell my health care provider.
- I don't take pain pills like ibuprofen (Motrin®, Advil®) or Naprosyn (Aleve®), especially if I have ascites.
- I keep a healthy weight and weigh myself regularly if my provider recommends it.
- I don't take too many Tylenol® (acetaminophen) pills, and I never take Tylenol with alcohol.
- I make sure to have a balance of work, rest, and exercise in my life.
- I avoid sleeping pills or tranquilizers.
- I cope well with stress (or I ask for guidance when I can't cope).
- If my provider tells me to take lactulose, I take enough to move my bowels two to three times a day.
- I tell my health care provider if I am depressed.
- I keep all my medical appointments or call if I need to reschedule.
- I have never smoked cigarettes, I have quit smoking, or I have discussed quitting with my health care provider.
- I have been tested to see whether I need to get the hepatitis A and B vaccines (hepatitis A and B are viruses that attack the liver).
- I have asked my health care provider whether I need a liver transplant.
- I have received the pneumonia vaccine, and I get my annual flu shot (people with cirrhosis are more likely to get infections).

For more information, visit [www.hepatitis.va.gov](http://www.hepatitis.va.gov)